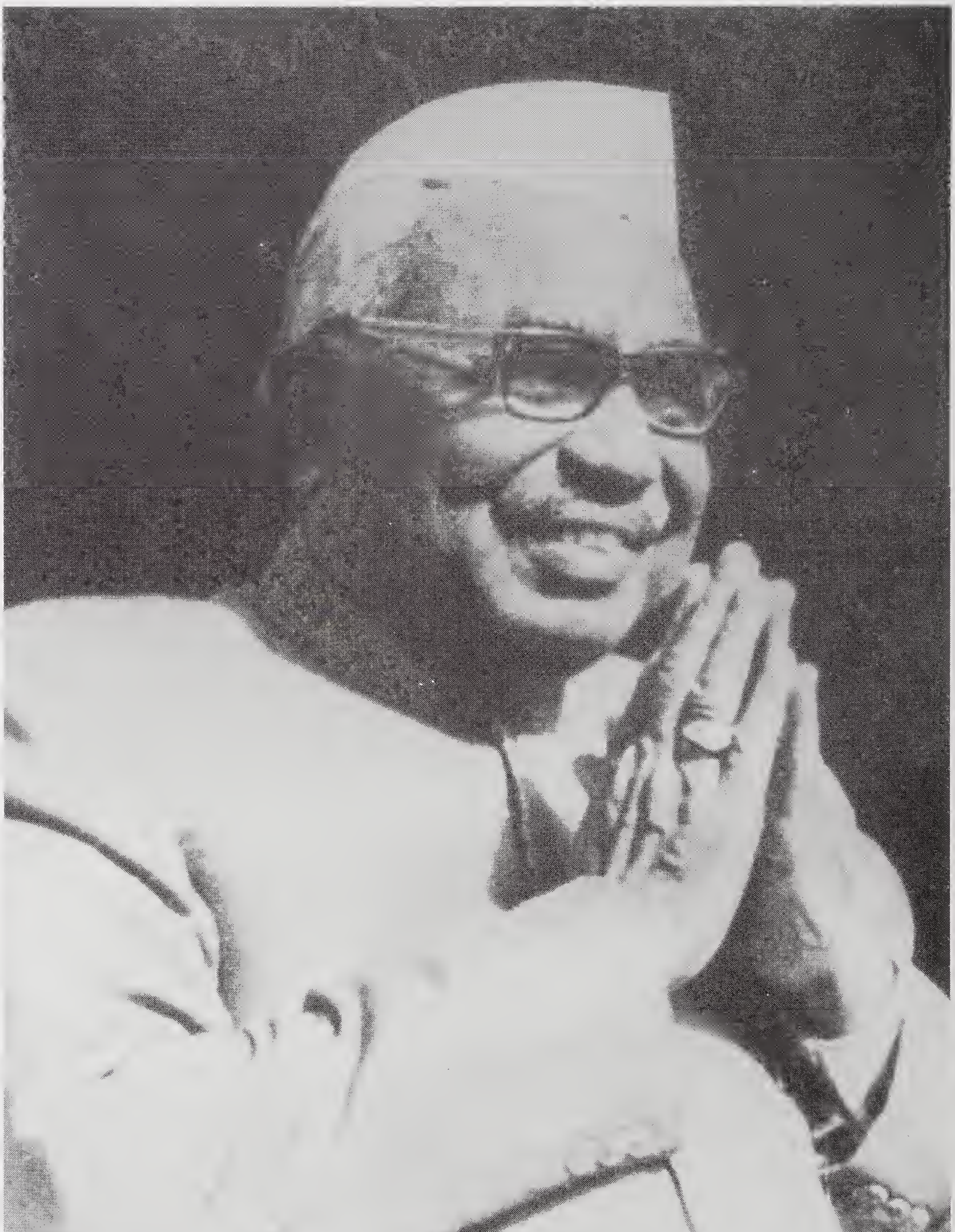
BUILDERS OF MODERN INDIA

BABU JAGJIVAN RAM

Om Prakash Maurya

PUBLICATIONS DIVISION



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Dr. Om Prakash Maurya

Translation
Dr. Rupali Kishore

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About The Series

The purpose of this book-series is to publish the biographies of those great men in India who have contributed in a major way to our national renaissance and the freedom movement.

It is quite essential that information about such great men is easily available to our present and future generations. In most cases, the authentic biographies of such great men are not available. This book-series is an attempt in the direction of bridging this gap. It is our endeavour to publish the simple short biographies of our eminent leaders, as written by scholars, who are authorities on the subject. Due to practical difficulties, it is possible that we may not be able to adhere to the historical chronological sequence, but we are fully confident that soon the biographies of all the eminent national personalities will figure in the series.

Preface

Among the builders of modern India, Babu Jagjivan Ram (Babuji) was a great man who served the nation with his thought, speech and action. He made his first appearance on the national scene, as an educated, meritorious patriot and social reformer in 1932, during the freedom struggle. As per the recommendations of the Simon Commission and in accordance with the Round Table Conferences— second and third, the Government of India Act, 1935 was implemented, through which the British conspired to consolidate their position as Administrators by their 'divide and rule' policy.

As a leader of the downtrodden classes, Babu Jagjivan Ram's prime concern was to unite the oppressed castes on a national scale. He volubly protested against caste discriminations and made efforts to remove it from the society as he believed that caste can not be a determinent factor to gauge human calibre. His sincere efforts, as the founder-president of the All India Depressed Classes League, left a great impact on the nation. It is due to his ceaseless toil that an alliance was forged between the Depressed Classes League and Congress in 1936, to contest 14 seats of the Bihar Legislative Assembly. Babu Jagjivan Ram was elected unopposed and his associates also won the elections. Consequently, Congress nominated him as the Secretary, Bihar Legislative Assembly, in 1937. It was because of Babu Jagjivan Ram's initiative that the oppressed classes people, associated with the Congress, and strengthened it. The Congress made future plans on the basis of his valuable suggestions for the upliftment of the oppressed classes.

As a freedom fighter, Babu Jagjivan Ram encouraged the oppressed classes people to associate with the freedom movement and inspired them to participate in the 'Civil Disobedience' and

'Quit India' campaigns. In response to an appeal by Mahatma Gandhi, Babu Jagjivan Ram courted arrest as a '*satyagrah*' (truth-force) activist in December 1940 and was imprisoned at the Hazaribagh Central Jail. Released a year later, he resumed his work as before. Following the call of Mahatma Gandhi on 8 August 1942, in the Congress general meeting, for a 'Quit India Movement' on 9 August 1942 itself, the British administration arrested Babu Jagjivan Ram along with other prominent leaders.

Upon his release in 1943, Babu Jagjivan Ram displayed tact and skill, in checking the attempts to convert the oppressed castes people to other religions. Under his guidance, the All India Depressed Classes League organised several secret meetings all over the country and its members held demonstrations against the British government. In 1946, Britain sent the Cabinet Mission to India, to accord independence to and facilitate self-governance in India, by establishing Executive Council and Constituent Assembly, exploring ways to frame a constitution. As a leader of the oppressed castes people, Babu Jagjivan Ram submitted a comprehensive memorandum to the Cabinet Mission on 8 April 1946, recommending special provisions in government jobs for the educated people from oppressed castes. This step proved to be a defining milestone for the upliftment of innumerable oppressed castes people.

Babu Jagjivan Ram took oath of office as Labour Minister when the interim union cabinet was formed on 02 September 1946. He held the same post when India attained Independence on 15 August 1947 and the Union Government was formed. The newly-independent nation faced many challenges in its overall development. Babu Jagjivan Ram accepted and faced these challenges as the Deputy Prime Minister and in the Union Council of Ministers, as the Minister for Labour, Employment, Rehabilitation, Transport, Communication, Railways, Civil Aviation, Shipping, Agriculture, Food, Community Development, Cooperatives, Rural and Urban Development, Industries, Commerce and Defence. Through his successful leadership in

these areas, he contributed immensely to nation building.

I express my gratitude to the Publications Division for the continued support and encouragement in bringing out the revised edition of this book. The Chapter, 'Equality and Society', makes the book complete. It is based on the material provided by and the interviews that I conducted with the Union Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment, Meira Kumar, the daughter of Babu Jagjivan Ram. I am grateful to respected sister Meira Kumar, for this cooperation. As the author, I believe that the book will enlighten readers about the personality and works of this great son of the soil and also inspire them.

I am grateful to the staff at the National Archives, Central Library (Government of India) and the Parliament Library, for the requisite support and material. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to my wife, Sushila Maurya, for her invaluable cooperation in completing this book.

Dr. Om Prakash Maurya

Contents

Background

BABU Jagjivan Ram was born on 05 April, 1908, on Sunday, at about 4 a.m. in Chandwa village of Arrah in Bihar. His father's name was Shobhi Ram and Basanti Devi was his mother. Shobhi Ram was an educated farmer, with twenty acres of farming land, producing mainly wheat, maize, barley, rice and lentils. He was respected in his own as well as neighbouring villages. Beside being hard-working, he was also friendly and affable by nature. He became a follower of the Shiv Narayani community after studying its literature and practised non-violence throughout his life.

India was then under British rule. The roots of its administration had gone so deep and strong that it seemed impossible to cut through them. The Britishers made all efforts to create disharmony in Indian society. Under their rule, all attempts were made to destroy the small scale industries. The medium-scale factories were replaced by such factories where products were manufactured by big machines. The Britishers collected production material more for their own needs rather than to those of the Indian citizens. They destroyed the Indian textile industry. They imposed more duties on the production of clothes so that their sale would suffer due to the lesser purchasing power of the consumers in the Indian market. The Britishers framed several laws to damage Indian commerce. Consequently, Indian textile industry could not prosper and the clothes manufactured in the factories of British capitalists, began selling well in Indian and international markets.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the British rulers constructed railway tracks in India, with the purpose of transporting raw material for industries, from different provinces of India to the ports and from there to England, while also using this route to make the goods imported from England available to the

consumers in different provinces of the country. A secondary objective of constructing railways was to facilitate the mobility of British troops so that the campaigns organised against the British rulers, for the freedom of our nation at different places could be suppressed conveniently.

On the construction of railways, the then Governor General of India, Lord Dalhousie had written, "the increase in demand for the goods manufactured in Europe has grown in the farthest markets of India. In this part of the universe, new markets are opening to us in such conditions that the foresight of even the wisest cannot calculate the limit of its future.[1]"

The Britishers had also put in disarray, the social system in India. They fostered hatred among the natives of India, on the grounds of caste, religion, region and languages. This strongly affected the rural economy. The self-sufficient rural life gave way to dependence on such city folks as were, directly or indirectly, sycophants of the Britishers. In the cities, there were only limited avenues of employment for the common man, while skilled Britishers worked on high positions in the big factories. Most of the labour was Indian and was paid much less wages, in comparison.

The British also brought about changes in the education system, as per their own requirements. While in their own country they made progress in science, engineering and technical education, in India they promoted an education system that produced only clerks. It was their endeavour that the Indians remain backward in the field of science, to the advantage of the Britishers. Thus, the changes in the education sphere benefited the British while the Indians were deprived of the benefits of ancient foundations of India's educational system. Attracting attention to the changes in the education system, K.M. Panika observed "the beginning of western education brought about a marked intellectual transformation in India.[2]"

The British atrocities shook India badly. In such a tense atmosphere, the need of the hour was to find a way to organise the Indians, in ties of unity for the freedom of the country. The tussle between the British rulers and the common man in India,

grew aggressive. In 1857, the Indian troops revolted against the British rulers. The landlords and the masses also participated actively in the revolt. Although this revolt was not successful, yet the path to the freedom of the country had been laid. The Britishers began discriminating against the Indian troops. At strategic locations, the British troops were kept in Indian regiments with the objective to suppress in the latter, the strong desire for freedom of their country and also to terrorise the Indian public, to the maximum extent possible. The increasing British atrocities on Indians and the revolt by the Indian troops against the British rule, played a key role in the struggle for freedom. The desire for freedom soon spread throughout the nation.

Indian National Congress was established on 28 December 1885. Its convention, presided over by Umesh Chandra Banerjee, was held in the conference hall of Gokuldas Tejpal Sanskrit College at Bombay. Representatives of different communities from all corners of India participated in this session. Lawyers, teachers, lecturers, principals of schools, newspaper proprietors, doctors, barristers, merchants, money lenders, landlords, social reformers and religious scholars etc participated in this convention. An alert sentinel of the Shiv Narayan community and a distinguished social reformer, Shobi Ram, father of Babu Jagjivan Ram, also participated in this convention and accepting the main idea of getting organised for the freedom of the nation, vowed to propagate it.[3]

It became quite clear from the proposals at this Congress convention that its aim was not upliftment of any community or region in particular, but the progress of all in the country, by securing freedom. This organisation demanded from the British rulers, along with political and economics rights, social justice for Indians as well. Keeping this objective in view, Congress membership grew by leaps and bounds and Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Anglo-Indians and Zoroastrians, all found representation in it.

The strength of Congress was affected by the happenings in the beginning of the twentieth century in the prominent countries of

the world. A battle ensued in 1904 between Japan and Russia in which the latter was defeated. On 16 October 1905, partition of Bengal was announced in India. In 1908, a revolution took place in Turkey. The Goverment in Russia provided greater number of rights to the public there.

While people were uniting for the independence of India, the Britishers were determined to spare no effort to quickly spread the poison of communalism in the country. In 1906, Muslim League was established, due to the British policy of divide and rule. Some Muslim leaders contended that in the fight for freedom, only the Hindu community would be benefited. Hence they sought to cooperate with the British, in the belief that their future would be safe in their hands. Accordingly, at that time, the Muslim League was opposed to the fight for freedom of India. Presiding over the first session of the All India Muslim League at Dhaka, Nawab Waqar-ul-Mulq said, "If the British rule is over in India then the Hindus will rule here. Our life, property and dignity will always be in danger. If we are to escape such a danger, then we will have to help preserve British rule. If the Muslims help the British whole-heartedly, then their rule will definitely endure. We should not imitate Congress policies. To remain loyal towards the British administration in India, is the only duty of the Muslims."[4]

The establishment of the Muslim League brought to fore clearly the fact that the Britishers tried their level best to keep the Muslims away from the struggle for independence. Affirming such a tactic, Ramsay McDonald wrote. "in Shimla and London, by obliging Muslims through diplomatic strategies, the British authorities have sown the seeds of dissent between the Hindus and the Muslims."[5]

On 01 August 1914, began the first world war and the British rulers dragged India also into it. The movement for independence of India gained momentum during this war. Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai, Aurobindo Ghosh and Vipin Chandra Pal intensified their political activities and toured the country, calling out for Hindu-Muslim unity. Those nationalist

Muslims, who after the establishment of the Muslim League had distanced themselves from the struggle for independence, rejoined it in the 1916 Lucknow joint session of Congress and the Muslim League. Mohammad Ali Jinnah led the Muslim League on the occasion. By that time, Jinnah had emerged as a prominent leader. Ambikacharan Majumdar was the Congress president. In this joint session, the resolutino jointly prepared by the committees of both the organisations, was accepted by both sides. According to the sentiments of the people, the planned draft for freedom of the country was submitted before the British rulers with the request for effective steps in this regard. People in the country lauded this joint effort of the Congress and the Muslim League.

On Congress–Muslim League reconciliation, Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak said, "I am glad that I remained alive these ten years, to see that we are together again in Congress, and together with one voice and moving shoulder-to- shoulder, we are going to promote this plan for our freedom. We should live to see the end of differences, not just within Congress, but also between the Hindus and the Muslims. So we are united again in this united country and Lucknow has made us thus fortunate. Therefore, I consider this Congress session as most auspicious."[6]

The people in the country were united again. The artificial line of discrimination drawn by the Britishers between the Hindus and the Muslims was erased to a certain extent. In the country, the movement for independence surged forth strongly again.

Towards the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, the birth of Babu Jagjivan Ram took place probably because he had an active role to play later, in representing millions of people of lower castes, in the struggle for independence of India. Also, he had a distinguished contribution to make, at the forefront, in the reconstruction, equitable progress, all-round development and prosperity of a free India.

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Childhood and Education

BABU Jagjivan Ram had an elder brother named Sant Lal while his sisters were Bal Keshi, Ram Keshi and Ram Dasi. Shobhi Ram had chosen the names of his children himself. When Jagjivan Ram was eight-months old, one day, sitting in his mother's lap, he was gazing at her, with his usual benign expression. Although she seldom ventured out with this baby, that day it so happened that along with the affectionate female neighbours and other ladies of the village, Basanti too, sat on the village platform near her home. The sky was clear, though a mild breeze was blowing. Plans were afoot for cutting the crop. Suddenly clouds gathered, and the weather became more pleasant.

Soon, in saffron garb, a holy sage approached. His beard was white and several long black and white necklaces adorned his neck. He carried the holy pot in one hand and a trident in the other. Though he appeared to be almost eighty years old, he had a distinguished personality. Delightedly, he looked at mother Basanti who sat with infant Jagjivan Ram in her lap, along with the other village ladies. Glancing at her child, the sage told Basanti, "Daughter, this son of yours will liberate thousands in the country. He will be soft-spoken and virtuous and will accomplish tasks, leading to the all-round development of the entire country. The luminosity of moon on his face and the moon arc at mid-forehead, clearly visible, means that this child will grow up to earn fame by philanthropy."[1]

Observing thus, the sage walked away and disappeared in the distance. Clutching her child to her bosom, Basanti carried him inside. A while later came rain amid the thunder of clouds and the crackle of lightening. The sky soon cleared though a pleasant breeze still blew and pondering over the incident, Basanti grew pensive. At the time Jagjivan Ram's father, Shobhi Ram was working at Calcutta.

With the passage of time, infant Jagjivan Ram grew into a toddler, playing with neighbourhood children, in village Chandwa. When he turned six-years old, an auspicious day was sought for his admission to school. The village astrologer suggested the day of *Basant Panchmi* (a festival heralding the advent of summer) as auspicious according to the planetary calculations, for the boy's admission to school. The writing slate was duly worshipped and Jagjivan Ram joined the village school. A ceremony of devotional songs was also held according to the customs of the Shiv Narayana sect.

However, fate did not bless child Jagjivan Ram with continued fatherly affections. Shobhi Ram fell ill. For twelve days, he could not eat and medicines were also stopped. One day, distraught at his father's condition, child Jagjivan Ram gazed forlornly at his mother. Tears streamed from his father's eyes as he stroked Jagjivan Ram's head, saying, "Son, I saw to it that your brother gained knowledge of English and does well, but I could teach not even Hindi language to you. I bless you that you will be successful in all exams and will set incomparable standards".[2]

Soon after, engrossed in worship of Shiv Narayani, Shobhi Ram passed away. The death of her husband brought a load of misfortunes upon mother Basanti. According to his father's wish, child Jagjivan Ram performed his last rites. Being deprived of his father's patronage, for Jagjivan Ram, a period of tribulations began.

Jagjivan Ram studied till class fifth in the school at Chandwa village. The success of his primary education was much due to the affections of a teacher there, by the name of Kapil Muni Tiwari. He was quite attached to the boy Jagjivan Ram and boosted his morale.

Once, during the rainy season, the floods in Ganga and Son rivers increased the water pressure in the drains of Chandwa village. The houses built on the low-lying areas of the village were flooded. Jagjivan Ram's house was flooded too. In this hour of crisis, Tiwari, who had a cemented house on the upper region in the village, gave refuge to the family of Jagjivan Ram for almost six months. He did not discriminate against them in any

way although at the time, it was the usual social norm to treat the castes lower in the social hierarchy, as untouchables. Jagjivan Ram belonged to the caste '*chamaar*', one much discriminated against, particularly by the upper castes. It is worth mentioning and praiseworthy a fact, that Kapil Muni Tiwari helped and gave shelter to the entire family of Jagjivan Ram, in their hour of need. He did not let them leave till their house was rebuilt in Chandwa. This was the main reason that Babu Jagjivan Ram grew to respect teachers so much. Reformist intellectuals can imagine how the humane behaviour of Tiwari deeply influenced the mind of child Jagjivan Ram and raised his morale.

After his primary education, Jagjivan Ram was admitted to the Arrah Mahajani School in the city. As compared to the village school atmosphere, the children here appeared better. According to the rules of this school, knowledge of English was compulsory. Since English language was not taught at the village school, Jagjivan Ram did not know it at all. However, he bought the required books of English grammar and studied diligently, reaching soon, the required standard of linguistic skill, at par with the other students. Continously succeeding in each class, the boy gained maximum marks in eighth standard also.

Even in childhood, Jagjivan Ram was so dignified and dutiful that he did not accept the scholarship given to the untouchable students. He also deposited the normal fees, like other students, at the Aara school. When the Principal of the school enquired as to why he was doing so, Jagjivan Ram replied humbly, "we have land with good produce. My elder brother is in government service at Calcutta and provides financial aid to our family. I do not require fee-concession or scholarship. If possible, give the scholarship of my share to some poor kid of upper caste and also grant him fee-exemption."[3] Patting his back, the Principal praised him, saying, "you are an ideal student, definitely, you will set high standards and serve the society well. My blessings are with you."[4]

After passing Middle-exams from Arrah Mahajani School, Jagjivan Ram got admitted to Arrah Town school. Since the beginning, he had been keen on Mathematics and Science,

securing a hundred percent marks in each of these subjects. He was also much interested in general knowledge, newspapers and magazines.

Babu Jagjivan Ram was much distressed by the discriminations meted out during student life. He had direct experience of untouchability fostering inequality and inhuman treatment. Babu Jagjivan Ram faced untouchability during his teenage years too. At Arrah Town School, drinking water arrangements for students were made by filling up two pitchers marked ‘Hindu and Muslim’. Once, seeing Babu Jagjivan Ram drinking water from the ‘Hindu’ pitcher, a high-caste student complained to the school Principal. The news spread quickly. People became anxious.

The Principal asked Babu Jagjivan Ram, “did you drink water from the ‘Hindu’ pitcher ?” He said, “yes. I did drink water from this pitcher because I am also a Hindu.” The Principal instructed him, “from tomorrow, arrangements will be made for another pitcher and you drink water from that pitcher.” Babu Jagjivan Ram accepted the order, but when a third pitcher was set up just for the untouchables, he broke the pitcher. The Principal was duly informed but remained calm, making no comments. On his command, a new pitcher replaced the broken one, but finding a suitable opportunity, Babu Jagjivan Ram aimed a pebble, breaking this one too. The students and teachers came to know of the incident and there was curiosity in the air.

Apprised of the situation, the Principal ordered for yet another pitcher to be immediately put out, for the untouchables. So it was when Babu Jagjivan Ram saw the new pitcher for the untouchables, he was outraged. Saying, “this is inhuman”, he kicked the pitcher, breaking it into pieces. His eyes were red with anger and his expression mutinous. Witnessing this incident, the teachers and students of the school realized that Babu Jagjivan Ram has acted appropriately and in favour of humanity. The Principal of the school termed this incident as a praiseworthy step and thus came to an end, the arrangement of a separate pitcher for the untouchables in the school.

The Principal ordered that the students termed as untouchable

will also drink water from the Hindu pitcher. Anyone objecting to this, can arrange drinking water separately for himself. In Babu Jagjivan Ram's life, this incident marked the beginning of the struggle for social revolution.

When Babu Jagjivan Ram was a Matric student, the great Indian social reformer and leader, Mahamana Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya visited Arrah. The school was well decorated and spruced up for his arrival. In the midst of all the students, teachers of the school and other eminent personalities of Arrah, Mahamana Malviya was garlanded. Babu Jagjivan Ram read out the welcome address and was praised for it by Pandit Malviya. Much impressed, he advised Babu Jagjivan Ram to receive post-Matric education from Kashi University. Babu Jagjivan Ram was elated at the offer and it boosted his morale. He duly thanked Mahamana Malviya. The counsel by Mahamana Malviya to Jagjivan Ram to receive higher education at Kashi University, became a hot topic for discussion in Arrah district and neighbouring villages. Babu Jagjivan Ram passed Matriculation in 1926, with a first division, from Arrah Town School. He received hundred per cent marks in mathematics and science subjects and excellent marks in other subjects as well. On perusing the exam results, the missionary of Methodist Church met Basanti and requested that Babu Jagjivan Ram may be permitted to get admission at Lucknow Christian College, for higher education. The church was to foot the total expenditure bills of his studies. Basanti was offended by this offer and registering her protest over this, she asked the visitor to leave immediately.

Keeping in mind Pandit Malviya's advice, Babu Jagjivan Ram took admission in Kashi University, for higher education. Accomodation was provided in the university hostel where other students began discriminating against him. The staff at the hostel mess refused to wash Babu Jagjivan Ram's used utensils. The problem grew serious. He contacted the hostel warden who sided with other students and the hostel staff. Ultimately, Babu Jagjivan Ram met Pandit Malviya who heard him out and advised him to prepare his own meals and wash his utensils himself.

Tempering his anger, Babu Jagjivan Ram replied, "this, I will not do. When, as a rule, the food for all the students is prepared in the hostel mess and collective dining takes place at a fixed location in front of the kitchen, then I will also eat along with the others, I will also not wash my used utensils." Over his opposing untouchability, for one day, no food was prepared in the hostel mess of Kashi University. The incident was widely discussed at the university. Several criticised his resistance to untouchability, but Babu Jagjivan Ram was least bothered since he knew that he was opposing the inhuman practice of untouchability.

Soon after, he quit the hostel and rented a room at Assi Ghat. Here too, when the landlord came to know that Babu Jagjivan Ram was an untouchable, he asked him to vacate the room. Referring to the advance payment of rent for the house, Babu Jagjivan Ram reprimanded the landlord, saying, "you have taken so much money as advance and are now asking me to leave the house". Such a retort to his uncourtly behaviour made the landlord apologise.

At the time, his mother Basanti stayed with Babu Jagjivan Ram at Benaras. Intially, the neighbours practised discrimination, but gradually people grew attached to and came to love mother Basanti and Babu Jagjivan Ram so much as to no longer consider them as untouchables. The main reason was Basanti's pious and hygienic routine of daily bath, worship, clean clothes and a neat house, adhering to the religious fasts of Ekadashi, Shivachaudas, Dussehra and Deepawali. Good conduct got her the respect, duly accorded to a lady.

One Sunday, Babu Jagjivan Ram thought of having his hair cut. In those days, the barber would visit the houses of high-caste people for cutting hair. Babu Jagjivan Ram called over a barber too. During the haircut, the barber enquired about Babu Jagjivan Ram's caste and he disclosed his caste as a 'chamaar'. Cutting hair no further, the barber enquired as to why he had not been told this before, commenting that their community does not cut the hair of the untouchables. If they do this, then society will boycott them. Babu Jagjivan Ram asked about where the

untouchables could get a haircut. The barber replied, the barbers in the city cut their hair.

Then Babu Jagjivan Ram asked as to what would happen if the untouchables did not perform any work for the barber. The barber was hesitant and after deliberating replied that that could not be. Babu Jagjivan Ram then hinted at the possibilities, saying, if you can behave so badly with the untouchables, then they can also do the same to you. The same way that an individual may not produce all the items of necessity but must depend on others in society as well, so are the untouchables, a part of the society and the mutual dependence is according to mutual requirements. The barber was moved and apologising to Babu Jagjivan Ram, he finished cutting his hair and then took his leave.

In Benaras, he had observed from close quarters, the practice of untochability. In 1928, Jagjivan Ram, passing Inter exams, went to Calcutta. In July 1928, he took admission to B.Sc in Calcutta's Vidya Sagar College. In Kashi University's library, he had intensively studied the Vedas, Upanishads and other religious scriptures. Gaining a good knowledge of Hindi, English and Sanskrit, he studied and became proficient in Bangla language too.

Gradually, Babu Jagjivan Ram was gaining the capability to fight the prevalent social evils and orthodox ways. He had come to know well, the caste differences in the society. How were castes formed? What is their origin? Why did the society give such importance to the caste system? How did untouchability come into practice? For answers to such questions, he consulted and read several books and came to a conclusion that untouchability is a curse for humanity. Its religious basis is negligible and therefore this practice would have to be discontinued since it fosters mean spiritedness in the society. The welfare of the society shall be possible only when untouchability is eliminated.

The idea of bringing about unity in the society took birth in Babu Jagjivan Ram's mind. He pondered the question as to why the society is in such a disarray. There is a need for somebody to unite the untouchables, organise them and foster in them an awareness of society so that their collective development can take

place. With such thoughts, he began visiting the untouchables' settlements. He would mingle with them and tell them about how they were not just all part of the society, they also constitute the society. He would direct them to educate their children so that they also think of this country as their own. In this way, beside studies, Babu Jagjivan Ram also began efforts for the upliftment of the untouchables, raising their confidence levels.

Gradually, Babu Jagjivan Ram came to be recognised as a reformist leader. By now, he had also started taking part in political activities. In January 1929, he organised a meeting of labourers and people of lower castes at Calcutta's Willingdon Square, in which people not only from Calcutta, but also other parts of Bengal, Bihar and U.P participated. Addressing them, Babu Jagjivan Ram observed, "the country's progress depends on all of us. We need to be alert of the enemies and well organised."[5] About fifty thousand people participated in this meeting. The success of organising this rally was so impressive that Babu Jagjivan Ram was much praised by the Vice-Chancellor, teachers and students of Calcutta University, mill-owners, labour leaders, civil authorities, etc. Photographs of Babu Jagjivan Ram and news of his resounding success were published in nearly all the newspapers of the country.

Successfully passing the exams of first year of B.Sc course, Babu Jagjivan Ram took admission in the second year. Then, in August 1929, he established the All India Ravidas Sabha. This organisation had the main objective of: 1) organising the untouchables (Babu Jagjivan Ram mentioned the untouchables by the term '*dalit*' for the first time 2) making efforts to educate them, and 3) propagating prohibition.

According to the objectives of this organisation, Babuji advised the people of oppressed communities to not consume intoxicants while remaining well organised. It was his conviction that stopping their consumption will lead to savings. With these savings, they may purchase household goods, eat better and be healthier. As their family atmosphere improves, they will also educate their children better. Education will lead to their intellectual progress and be conducive to their physical development as well. They will become

aware of their duties towards the society and shall constitute an organised nation, capable of encountering any danger.

Beside sympathy for the people of oppressed communities, Babu Jagjivan Ram also understood his obligations towards the poor and labourers of all communities. With a view to promoting awareness of their rights among the labour class, he advised them to join the Congress. He realized that no nation can progress without inculcating discipline among the labour class. Addressing a rally in Calcutta, he stated, "labourers are the backbone of the country."[6]

Babu Jagjivan Ram was also influenced by the communist ideology in those days. He had studied in-depth, the communist manifesto of Karl Marx's *Das Kapital.* Much impressed by the communist ideas, he established contact with such revolutionaries fighting for the freedom of the country as Chandra Shekhar Azad and Manmathnath Gupta.

At the time, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose was known as the leader of the extremist group in the Congress. His ideas on upliftment of the untouchables deeply impressed Babu Jagjivan Ram who contacted Netaji in Calcutta, furnishing full details of his own work. Netaji was already aware of him. Subhas Babu was convinced that "the day, dissatisfaction arises in these exploited classes against their pitiable conditions, the spark of rebellion will simmer and these classes will explode like volcanoes. Such a rebellion by them will bring about a public revolution in the country that will not just transform the Hindu society but also lead national life towards a new path."[7]

As a student leader, Babu Jagjivan Ram wanted to bring about, among the oppressed castes people, such a peaceful change as would not only improve their standard of living but also make them aware of their contribution to the country. He wanted to change the deplorable conditions of the *dalit* so that their economic situation is stabilised and they can organise, educating their children well. He was also helping in every way, the leaders and the extremist revolutionaries' group, for the cause of the freedom of the country. Babu Jagjivan Ram provided financial aid to the

revolutionary warrior, Chandra Shekhar Azad and his many associates and also gave refuge at his home to the revolutionaries on the run.

In 1931, Babu Jagjivan Ram passed his graduation exam in science from Calcutta University and after a brief stay at Calcutta, returned to Chandwa where he became fully involved in social work and politics.

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The Vow

DURING the almost two hundred years of British rule in India, the country had become backward in all spheres. The main reason was that the rulers were British and England held political dominance over a subjugated India, taking decisions about the management of its economy. However, commenting on the topic, writers from the western countries consider, as the main components of India's backwardness, such factors as its social system, religious fundamentalism, over-population, lack of capital investment and industries as well as means of transportation. Knowles has remarked, "India's religious and social structure is the main reason of its poverty."[1]

However, large-scale poverty was itself indicative of the fact that the structure of industries was not suitable for the country. Many taxes were levied on agriculture. During the British rule, the landlords were allowed to exploit the farmers. Money-lending practice had immersed the poor farmers in debt. If the loan was not repaid on time, the money-lender would become owner of the land, rendering the farmer, a mere labourer. Small scale industries had been destroyed to a large extent. Britishers sent most raw materials at less cost to England. When the manufactured goods would be imported into India, the only concern of the Britishers was to make a profit, by selling it at increased price. Alongside, they would under-price or sell at approximate cost price the Indian products causing loss of profit to the Indian manufacturers. Gradually therefore, the production of such goods dwindled and the country grew increasingly dependent upon the industries in England. Thus, in colonial times, India grew poorer.

About the British administration in India, Dadabhai Naoroji wrote "the country is continously growing poor and handicapped."[2] In 1891, the Congress, describing the socio-economic situation of

the country, in one of its proposals, observed,"the people of the country, with increasing population, are caught in a deplorable situation, on the verge of impoverishment and each decade, lakhs of people are actually dying of hunger."[3]

Under British rule, people of lower castes were in a pitiable situation. Considered as untouchables by the Hindus, this was one community towards which society behaved in an inhuman manner. In the perspective of the social structure in the country, their settlements were on the fringes of the village and other sections of society did not mix with them. They were mostly poor. Among them, only the wise and those with cultivable land, sought contact with upper-caste Hindus.

Even in the pre-British period in India, the social conditions of the low-caste Hindus were quite dissatisfactory. High caste Hindus did not attend their functions and celebrations, although they observed the same traditions and customs as other castes in the community, viz horoscope by a priest upon a baby's birth, naming-ceremony; the '*chhathi*' celebration, (six days after birth a function in honour of the new birth-mother); cleaning, painting and decorating the house and the courtyard; treating friends and relatives to a feast; festive songs by womenfolk and inviting the community to join the celebrations on the happy occasion. However, the scale of functions depended on the financial circumstances of the concerned untouchable.

During British rule, the Christian Missionaries spread quickly all over India as the British knew well that most Indians are poor and a large number are untouchables who can be converted to Christianity with merely the temptation of education. The question naturally arises as to whether the concept of untouchability originated from the non-Aryans or the Aryans created class order. Some scholars believe that the class-order was established upon the arrival of Aryans in India. With the creation of *Rigveda* scripture, the class-order came up, giving birth to the caste traditions in the country.

In the *purush sukta* of the tenth *mandala* in the *Rigveda* scripture, are described the four classes of society viz *Brahmin, Kshatriya*,

Vaishya and *Shudra*. Those who conducted studies, teaching and religious functions in the society, came to be addressed as *Brahmins*. Those defending the country were termed as *Kshatriyas*. Those shouldering the responsibilities of agriculture, commerce and trade became known as *Vaishyas* while people serving the society were called as *Shudras*. The mention of the class *Shudra* appears to come from the Aryans mixing with the non-Aryans. It becomes quite clear from various religious scriptures that the class-order existed in India in fourth century B.C.

In the first chapter of the *Arthashastra* treatise, composed in the Mauryan era, Chanakya has explained at length, these four classes. By the Mahabharata age, the qualities and occupation of the four classes appears fixed. In the beginning, the class-order was associated with birth. Therefore an individual born in a particular community belonged to that class only, no matter what his unique qualities, actions or profession were. The beliefs underwent a gradual change. However, in *Srimad Bhagvad Gita*, Lord Srikrishna announces that, on the basis of conduct, I have created the four classes. The meaning of this statement is that the class of people will be decided by their qualities and deeds. Yet, since Vedic period till today, while people's views have changed, the number of castes has also grown.

During British Rule in India, although the structure of caste system and the untouchability prevailing therein remained stable, the Christian missionaries spread education even among the untouchables who on a geographical basis generally lived less in cities and more in the villages. The means of their livelihood was the reward that they received for working in the fields of the landowners. Reward here denotes not just cash but also food-grains or cooked meals. Lower castes worked at tilling the fields, sowing seeds, irrigation, guarding the crops, cutting it when ripe, separating foodgrains from chaff, collecting it from the fields for sale in the market—all according to the landowners' commands. Their work also included arranging fodder or extracting milk from animals to supply at the houses of landowners and others.

Among the lower castes, there were some whose pre-occupation

was to extract leather from animal corpses, smoothening, colouring, tanning it and preparing footwear and other articles of need accordingly, for the neighbouring area villagers as well as the city folks. Beside small-scale leather products, they also worked at preparing domestic tools, utensils, ropes, baskets, cots, coarse fabric as well as carpentry and construction work. Since, beside womenfolk, children as well assisted in the process, they were not able to get even primary education, beside the social restrictions on them. The financial condition of the lower castes was pathetic. Although no concrete evidence is available in this regard, it may be said that due to poor economy, the social standard of the lower castes would have remained the same for hundreds of years.

During the British rule, beside the caste traditions, social evils viz, restrictions on widow remarriage, ignoring women's education, child marriages, female infanticide, marrying young girls with much older men, sati-custom etc. were also present. These deeply and adversely affected not only the country's fortune but also added to the backwardness of the lower castes. When we compare one society with another or to put it as when people of two communities are compared, generally we assess their customs, traditions, education, religion, cultural conduct and ideologies as prevalent in those communities. If this comparison is done in the perspective of casteism, in view of the structure of class-order, we will find that in our country religious beliefs have a dominating influence over the social ones. It is the main reason why the socio-economic condition of the lower castes remained dismal during almost two-hundred years of British rule in our country.

Indians had become quite dispirited by the British hegemony. The materialistic attitude of the British deeply damaged the spiritual beliefs inherent in Indian culture. The British were not in favour of providing scientific and technical education to Indians. Their main objective was to export the raw material available in India, to England and to sell in this country the British manufactured goods at profitable rates. Still, the British culture of pomp and show lured a large section of Hindus. The lower castes too, were attracted.

At this time during the nineteenth century, imbued with the sentiments of renaissance, several social and religious movements came to fore, main among which were Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, Ramakrishna Mission, The Theosophical Society, etc. Due to the ills ailing Hinduism, youths were also being drawn to Islam and Christianity. According to the need of the hour, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, a renowned scholar and a top social reformer, established Brahmo Samaj on 20 August, 1828. Discriminatory forces ruled the society at the time along with inhuman practices. There were restrictions on widow remarriage. Society encouraged child marriages. Women had few rights, if any. People felt suffocated by the religious fundamentalism and plethora of superstitions. There was social disarray. In such circumstances, under the leadership of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Brahmo Samaj began a compaign against casteism as there were destructive anti-national and anti-democratic elements in the caste system.[4] Although Raja Ram Mohan Roy, in an organised manner, did intiate steps for the elimination of the caste system and the number of his followers ran into lakhs, yet, in spearheading this campaign, he could not achieve the success that was his due. Here, it should be duly mentioned, that the credit goes to him for spreading awareness in society against the inhuman ways of casteism then prevailing in the society. He was successful in putting an end to the custom of sati, the benefits of which move, were reaped by the society during his life and even after his death.[5]

Inspired by Keshav Chandra Sen, a follower of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Prarthana Samaj was established in 1867, in Maharashtra. This movement also opposed casteism and superstitions. Initially, it spread quickly, but within thirty years, it lost momentum.[6] Yet several scholars opine that it spread awareness in society and brought about a change in attitudes towards untouchability.

On 10 April 1875, Swami Dayanand established Arya Samaj in Bombay. He opposed idol worship and wanted to mould India according to the precepts of the *Vedas*. He believed that " although other religions have also accepted truth, only the knowledge of

vedas is the knowledge of religion. It is for the entire human kind. Therefore, forgetting the differences of colour, caste and country, entire human race should embrace this."[7] Gradually Arya Samaj too became a vehicle of social revolution. The study of *Vedas*, limited to the upper caste, now became accessible to all. This denoted an intellectual revolution alongside the social one. Arya Samaj vehemently opposed the caste system and the various social evils and superstitions originating from it.

Through the medium of Arya Samaj movement, came about in the Indian Society a new awakening and the sense of a social reponsibility towards obligations. At the time, it also deeply affected the issue of women's education. Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru commented about the Arya Samaj that "it was a crusade for internal reforms and alongside, it was also a defence mechanism for protection from external attacks."[8] By calling upon the entire society, at the intellectual level, to study the *Vedas*, Swami Dayanand also made the seed of awareness about the rights to equality blossom in the minds of the upper case Hindus. After his death, the organisation grew somewhat inactive in the matter of eliminating casteism.

Enthused by the religious fervour of Swami Ramakrishna Paramhans, Swami Vivekananda founded the Ramakrishna Mission (after the name of his guru) in 1897. He believed that to experience God within one's own self and to serve each man and woman, who are the embodiment of the Godly being, is the duty of human beings."[9] This organisation propagated *Vedanta* philosphy of non-dualism in the religious sphere and also worked against the superstitions prevailing in the society. For organising the society, it also raised voice against casteism. Swami Vivekananda termed the inhuman behaviour against the lower castes as a slur on humanity. Through its endeavours against discriminations, their movement did bring about changes in the society, but even such changes in Hindu Society could not gain success, as per set objectives.

In the series of the social reform movements in India, the name of Theosophical Society, established in New York by Henry Steel

Olcott and Blavatsky Helena is important. Being an active member of this society, Mrs. Annie Besant began working in India from 10 May, 1889 according to the objectives of this society. This society sought cooperation from religion, to save the people drifting in the flow of materialistic ideology. It considered the values of world-fraternity, cooperation, equality and mutual amity as supereme.[10] The Theosophical Society emerged as a mass movement, but its objectives could not much influence the establishment of a casteless society as its work area in general was the spread of amity, fostering nationalism and strengthening Hinduistic sentiments. It also propagated love and loyalty towards one's country.

Then, on 28 April 1916, Lokmanya Tilak established the Home Rule League at Poona. The main objective of this national level institution was to fight the British tyrannical rule for dominion-status of India. This movement of mass-awakening also brought together people of all castes and religions.[11] Through the medium of this campaign, not only was the lesson of unity imparted, by linking together the people of different political organisations, religions and castes, but the Congress moves for self-rule also gained in strength. The propagandists and functionaries of this organisation toured the nation extensively, to work for Hindu-Muslim unity and oppose discrimination. With regard to the endeavours for Hindu-Muslim unity, Tilak remarked, "In such a situation when we have to fight a powerful third force then it is an important event. It is a big issue. People of all religions and castes are sharing one platform. From the perspective of religion, castes and different types of political views, our target is the same."[12]

On 31 December 1929, a Congress session was held at Lahore, on the banks of the river Ravi. It proposed complete independence for India. After getting this proposal approved by those present, the same day at midnight (on new year's eve of 1930), the flag for independence of India was unfurled. Thus began the Civil Disobedience Movement. On 09 April 1930, Mahatma Gandhi instructed, "Our path is set. In each village, salt should be brought or prepared illegally. Sisters should picket liquor shops, opium

vends and the shops selling foreign textiles. Youths and the old people should work on the spinning wheel in their houses and weave cotton. Foreign clothes will have to be burnt. Hindus should give up untouchability. Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Zoroastrians should increase interaction. After fulfiling the requirements of the minorities, the majority shall have to make do with what remains. Students should quit schools and colleges. Government employees should resign from their positions and begin serving people. Then we will soon see that self-rule comes knocking upon the door."[13]

In those days, Babu Jagjivan Ram was studying for a graduation degree in science at Vidya Sagar College in Calcutta. He was a keen and meritorious student who came to be known as a good social reformer too. In the second week of January in 1930, he collected political activists and social reformers and raised slogans against British administration. Consequently, there was a lathi-charge. Babu Jagjivan Ram also received cane strokes and injuries. It brought him into limelight in Calcutta.

Beside studies, Babu Jagjivan Ram was also associated with dalit upliftment in earnest. He possessed an irrepressible fervour to be educated and that had to be accomplished as well. However, in the shadow of the civil disobedience movement, Mahatma Gandhi's command, "Hindus should give up discrimination" touched Babu Jagjivan Ram's heart. Although he was already working for the welfare of the underprivileged, yet Mahatma Gandhi's call for drive against untouchability affected him strongly. By now, his work-sphere of welfare of the castes was becoming more extensive by the day.

In 1931, Babu Jagjivan Ram successfully passed B. Sc. His mother Basanti and others at home were quite happy at the exam results. His mother Basanti wanted him to strive for higher degrees and fructify his late father's blessings, but this was not possible. He was enamoured by the cause of the national struggle for freedom. His lot was to emanicipate thousands of the under-privileged untouchables, showing them the path to progress. An empathic scholar can evaluate how his patriotism and desire to

serve the *dalits* was far higher and pragmatic sentiment, than attachment to mere academic degrees.

Mahatma Gandhi was the source of inspiration and basis of Babu Jagjivan Ram's intense patriotism and endeavours for the welfare of the untouchables. Babu Jagjivan Ram was in favour of "interest of many, happiness of many," a concept that he later gave a concrete form to, in its true sense. He desired to see the country joined in the ties of unity, equality and fraternity, beside freedom. This was the reason that he opposed the separate electoral system for the untouchables. He not only raised his voice against the untouchables converting from Hinduism, but with pragmatism, he endeavoured to prevent such a happening. He always criticised any conspiracy to challenge the integrity and unity of the country.

It would be pertinent to quote Mahatma Gandhi's poignant words here, "It is a slur on Hinduism to mark the downrodden as untouchables. It is a sin, strictly a severe crime and if the Hindu religion does not kill this big serpent in time, the latter will swallow the former. The untouchables should no more be considered as outcastes. They should be recognised as respectable people in Hindu society and they should be understood as belonging to a class according to their occupation. From my explanation of class, today, in Hinduism, the class-order is no more in practice. People called as Brahmins have quit teaching and taken to other occupations. The same can be said of other classes as well, to some extent. Actually, being under foreign rule, we are all slaves. Therefore, in the eyes of the Westerners, we are even worse than *Shudras*. Why does God permit such atrocities? Ravana was a demon but this demon of untouchability is more horrible than Ravana and when we worship this demon in the name of religion, then the enormity of our sin increases even more. This cannot be the Hindu religion. It is through Hindu religion that I have learnt to respect Christranity and Islam. Then how can this sin be a part of Hinduism? Against such hypocrisy and lack of knowledge, I shall fight alone, strive alone and die in the conflict if need be. According to my limited wisdom, the filth that the scavenger picks up is physical and can be removed immediately, but those whose

mind is coated with the filth of falsehoods and hypocrisy, their filth is so microscopic, that it is difficult to remove. If someone is to be branded as untouchable, it is these people, full of lies and hypocrisy. The orthodox concept of untouchability is always to be condemned. Due to it, for two thousand years now, volumes of sin have been loaded on, in the name of religion and even now it is being loaded so. I call this custom, a farce. You will have to be free from this hypocrisy, and you are already doing penance for it. There are so many verses in the scriptures and several are entirely devoid of importance. Then too, I have not come across a single Hindu who does abide by or wish to carry out each and every command of *Manusmriti* and it is easy to prove that whoever does so, in the end shall ultimately succumb. The *Sanatana* (eternal) religion cannot be protected by supporting each verse, written in the scriptures. Instead, it will be saved by translating into action, the principles propounded therein. On one hand, this country is considered as holy by all because of its spirituality, piety and compassion and on the other hand, it is a playground of vices wilfulness, sin and cruelty."[14]

Babu Jagjivan Ram was much impressed by such a stream of thought. Discharging his obligations as a top leader, in the struggle for freedom, Mahatma Gandhi undertook the good work of not letting the untouchables separate from Hindus in the society, thus saving the nation from the danger of disintegration. Babu Jagjivan Ram understood well that though he was striving to uproot untouchability from India, Mahatma Gandhi's fight for self-rule was for the benefit of all, instead of a community in particular. Gandhiji lived in the settlements of untouchables, with the objective of lessening the influence of discriminatory practices. Sharing meals with them and getting involved in sanitation drive was his untiring and pragmatic endeavour to bring about intellectual revolution in the society. The society accepted this by heart and followed suit.

From his student days, Babu Jagjivan Ram accepted Mahatma Gandhi's leadership. He strengthened the struggle for independence by assisting in many ways, Chandra Shekhar Azad, Rajguru and

other devoted freedom fighters branded as revolutionaries by the foreign rulers in India. In those days, the British government was arresting the leaders of labour unions without adequate reasons. They were also being tortured. In the factories and mills, a large number of labourers were being discharged. Though young and a student, Babu Jagjivan Ram was fighting for their interests by joining the struggle of labour unions. He served them day and night.

At Calcutta, Babu Jagjivan Ram organised seminars, meetings and secret deliberations at several places, just to unite the labourers. The Labour Class became organised due to his ceaseless toil. They grew aware of their calibre and capabilities and in Calcutta, emerged as a powerful force. The efforts of Babu Jagjivan Ram, as regards generating awareness of their rights among the labour and discharging his own obligations towards the country in full, were lauded by lakhs. Wherever he was called, it became a casual matter to see assembled, a crowd of about fifty thousand or so. His endeavours to unite labour and work for the welfare of the untouchables had made him a big leader, even during his student life.

In 1931 when he reached his village Chandwa, after science graduation with high marks from Calcutta, he paid his respects to his mother and elder brother Sant Lal who had returned to Chandwa after retirement. Babu Jagjivan Ram's exam-results pleased his mother Basanti and his elder brother too shared the good news with other villagers. Basanti sent for and distributed sweets in the village. Both Mrs. Basanti and Sant Lal grew ambitious for the young Jagjivan Ram. Basanti wanted her dear son to join a high government position as did his elder brother. Jagjivan Ram knew very well his dear mother's aspiration to see him as a high-ranking official but in his own heart, there was a burning desire to work for the upliftment of the dalits and the independence of the country. Charitable by nature, Basanti also knew in her heart that her son's disposition was to serve people.

Meanwhile, due to scarce rain the year before, there was a famine in Bihar and people were dying of hunger in large numbers. Epidemics raged and the residents of Bihar were a ravaged lot. In this hour of distress, Babu Jagjivan Ram worked tirelessly. Basanti knew of this. While he was studying in Calcutta, the details of Babu Jagjivan Ram's works were sometimes published in newspapers which the villagers narrated to her. However, young Jagjivan Ram could hardly muster the courage to inform his mother that he would not join a government job but would serve the country as a freedom fighter and also work for securing due rights for the untouchables.

As time passed, Babu Jagjivan Ram's mother would ask sometimes, "son, are you filling up forms for a government job?" Jagjivan Ram would reply, "I am trying."[15] His brother too would enquire and receive the same respectful answer. At the time, Mahatma Gandhi was in Yerwada prison. Dr. Rajendra Prasad was invited as the chief guest at a huge seminar to oppose untouchability, held in the Anjuman Islamia auditorium situated at Patna. Jagjivan Ram was also invited to the same, as a speaker. His speech at the meeting impressed Dr. Rajendra Prasad and other prominent leaders. Some excerpts are given below: "the objective of our life is to uproot the British rule from India, under the guidance and the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. He is in Yerwada prison now. The British government is imprisoning thousands of youths too in the country. At jail, they endure several problems. Meals are not provided in time, the food is of inferior quality. These patriots `striving for freedom, are tortured in many ways. If one falls sick, no medical treatment is administered. All types of pressure is exerted on them to force them away from the struggle for independence and to cooperate with the British. Mohammad Ali Jinnah has exhorted the Muslims to form a separate country. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar has demanded the arrangement of separate electoral zones for the untouchables. Some people are of the opinion that such conditions have weakened the fight for the freedom of the country. This is not so. It is clear to the public, in this crisis, who does or does not aspire for the country's freedom. The Muslims are trying to convert the untouchables to Islam. Christian Pope and

the missionaries are tempting the untouchables with several offers to convert to Christianity. They are offering good housing lump-sum cash, land and free education for children. Buddhist propagandists are guiding them to accept Buddhism. At this time, I want to ask these contractors of religion whether they can convert to Hinduism, forsaking their own religion? If not, then is it not a detestable joke to ask the untouchables thus? Is this not a cruel blow of a repressive religious policy, upon us thousands of poor untouchables? I agree that religious fervour is justifiable to a certain extent but it is a bad influence upon crossing that limit. I am against all religious conversions. The untouchables are Hindus. We were born as Hindus and shall die so. We have created the nation, not vice versa. This is our nation. Indians only shall have to attempt to unify India. Presiding over the recently organised All India Congress Committee, Mahatma Gandhi, among other things, has also decided that "untouchability shall have to be eradicated". All have strongly supported this Congress proposal. It has given new hope to the oppressed people. It is my firm belief that Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru and Vithal Bhai Patel shall implement this proposal in the interest of the nation. I also vow that for this, I shall not hesitate in making sacrifices. We shall have to collectively oppose the unjust and untimely demands that some people have made to the British rulers, during the freedom-struggle. Ever since I have come of age, despite being a student, I am at the forefront in this fight for freedom of the country. From tomorrow, I am again undertaking a tour of central and south India, We shall have to rouse the society against religious conversions. Practice of discrimination (against lower castes) shall have to be given up. People of all religions and castes shall have to associate themselves with this fight for the freedom of the country. Come, let us take an oath today, to contribute actively in the mass movement, under Mahatma Gandhi's guidance and also ensure the integrity of the country beside securing its independence."[16]

This eloquent speech by Babu Jagjivan Ram not only impressed the chief guest of the function, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, but other respectable attendees and the audience as well. When the function

was over, Dr. Rajendra Prasad immediately asked young Babu Jagjivan Ram to meet him at Patna where he was staying temporarily. Accepting the invitation, Babu Jagjivan Ram met him on schedule and Rajendra Prasad asked him to work for the Anti-Untouchability Society. The main objective of this society was the progress of the untouchables and elimination of caste discrimination practices. In this way, Babu Jagjivan Ram also became associated with this society. Dr. Rajendra Prasad was familiar with Babu Jagjivan Ram's struggles during his student life. He knew well of the young man's active role in the fight for freedom of India.

In September 1931, the British administration organised the second Round Table Conference at London in which, from India, kings and several eminent personalities participated, beside Muslim League, Christian Society and Hindu Mahasabha, Trade Associations, representatives of untouchables and Sikhs. Mahatma Gandhi also participated in this conference. On 23 September 1931, he remarked, "what do we want and why do we want it? I have said not once but several times. We shall be satisfied only with complete autonomy. We want to live as your partners, not slaves. While things advance according to our wishes, we will stay with you. When we see things happening otherwise, we will go our own way."[17]

Meanwhile, Lord Willingdon replaced Lord Irwin as the Viceroy of British Government in India. After participating in the meetings of the Second Round Table Conference at London, Mahatma Gandhi was due back in India and Dr. Rajendra Prasad wrote to him about Babu Jagjivan Ram's calibre and intense devotion. Beside other details about him, he had also referred to him as an "invaluable gem."

When Mahatma Gandhi reached Bombay, he was accorded a grand welcome and large-scale dinner arrangements were made in his honour. Several eminent personalities participated in the function. Babu Jagjivan Ram was also invited and he reached Bombay with Dr. Rajendra Prasad. The next day, in the presence of Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Mahatma Gandhi gave Babu Jagjivan Ram, guidelines for a more active role in the struggle for

independence of India. Beside this, he also entrusted the state-level responsibilities of the work of Harijan Sevak Sangh in Bihar province to Babu Jagjivan Ram, who gladly accepted the same. He then returned from Bombay to his village, Chandwa.

Under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi, Babu Jagjivan Ram bowed his head before his mother Basanti, vowing at her feet, "with your blessings, I will strive for the rights of the country's thousands of untouchables, social equality, assistance to poor, labour rights and self-rule for India. It will be my endeavour that in the country there be an atmosphere of peace, fraternity, unity, goodwill and amity."[18]

Hearing this, the mother affectionately embraced her able son, blessing him and invoking the blessings of God as well.

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15. From Babuji's diary.
16. From Babuji's diary.
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18. From Babuji's diary.

Striving for Independence and Dalit Welfare

THE people of India had become convinced that the Britishers will have to hand over the authority to them, but the British let loose a reign of oppression. Among the many incidents of repression by the British, the Jalianwala Bagh massacre is the most notorious. On 01 April 1919, in protest against the banishment from Amritsar of Dr. Saifuddin Kitchlew and Dr. Satyapal, a meeting was organised at Jalianwala Bagh at which nearly twenty five thousand people had gathered. General Dyer ordered firing on this peaceful assembly. About 380 people were killed and nearly 2000 were seriously wounded. Many people were forced to crawl like animals. This terrible incident shook the Indians strongly. However, the struggle for independence was only strengthened by it. Commenting on this, the British historian, Sir Valentine Chirol wrote, "it cannot be denied that the movement took the shape of an organised rebellion."[1] On 20 March, 1920, the Indian National Congress gave final shape to the proposal of Mahatma Gandhi for civil disobedience in India and publishing it in the form of a letter, distributed it to be implemented all over India. Civil disobedience movement spread so quickly that Mahatma Gandhi announced that we will gain autonomy by 31 December, 1921. However, after a police post was set afire at Chauri-Chaura in western U.P., Mahatma Gandhi called a halt to the movement. He did not want that violence be used even for a just cause. After this the British rulers put many Congress leaders into prison and subjected them to torture. On 13 March 1923, Mahatma Gandhi was arrested on the charge of sedition. On 18 March 1923, his case came up for hearing at Ahmedabad and he was sentenced to six years imprisonment. Thus the movement for freedom of India lost momentum for a while.

On 03 February 1928, Simon Commission (also known as Indian Statutory Commission) reached India from England. However, there were no Indian representatives in it and all its members were British. The main purpose of this commission was to study as to what reforms should be carried out in the laws regarding the colonies. Black flags were shown to the commission upon its arrival at Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi and Lahore. There were strikes. Ultimately, the commission returned to England without completing its task. The Congress was following the policy of carrying along all people of different religions and castes from all over India in the struggle for independence of the country, but through Muslim League as a medium, no effort was being spared to stoke the spark of comunalism. Several religious and political organisations with narrow conservative outlooks were also offering resistance.

On 24 March 1931, Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru were hanged by the British rulers in India. The entire nation was submerged in an atmosphere of grief and resentment. Under the chairmanship of Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel, a Congress session was held at Karachi, on 25 March, 1931. Saluting the martyrs' sacrifice for the love of their country, on the altar of struggle for the independence of India, Congress recorded, "our fight for freedom will continue. On the path of non-violence shown by Gandhiji, Congress shall run its set program against the tyranny of the Britishers."[2]

The British government organised the Second Round Table conference in London from September till December 1931 in which, beside the Congress delegate Mahatma Gandhi, commerce and trade delegations, the representatives of Hindu, Muslim, Sikh religion and untouchables also participated. The main purpose of this conference was to start a system of reserved constituencies for the untouchables, Muslims and Sikhs. Mahatma Gandhi opposed this and stated, "even if I get the entire kingdom of the world, then too, I shall not compromise on the rights of the untouchables. Those who talk of reserved constituency and political rights have no idea of how the Indian society has been created. How are the oppressed classes a fragmented lot here? If I have to oppose the

idea of reserved constituency, all by myself, then too I shall prevent it even at the cost of my life."[3]

Mahatma Gandhi returned to India. The British Prime Minister, Ramsay McDonald on 10 August 1932, garnering support from the communal elements, announced the McDonald Communal Awards arranging reserved constituencies on communal basis for Hindus, Muslims and untouchables in the Legislative Assembly. Mahatma Gandhi opposed this as it distinguished the *harijan* untourchables from the Hindus. Resisting the communal policy of the Britishers, Gandhi, who was under house arrest at the Yerwada prison near Poona, began a fast-unto death in September 1932. The entire country supported him strongly and ultimately the government backtracked on its communal decision.

At the time, Jagjivan Ram was busy organising meetings at Calcutta and Patna for the *harijan* rights. While studying at Calcutta, he founded the Ravidas Sabha. He worked sincerely for the cause of organising *harijan* people. He also roused the labour-class against atrocities by the British government and inspired them to organise themselves better. Visiting *harijan* settlements, he asked the *harijan* women to educate their children and exhorted them to remain united.

On 01 June 1935, Babu Jagjivan Ram's marriage took place, with Indrani, daughter of Dr. Birbal, an eminent personality of Kanpur who had been awarded the Victoria medal for distinguished service during the Chin-Lushai war.[4] Who knew that this newly-wed lady would later shoulder so many responsibilities in her role as the ideal wife of Babu Jagjivan Ram, a nation-builder!

Babu Jagjivan Ram was completely involved with the Civil Disobedience movement led by Mahatma Gandhi. He criticised separatism and communalism. While Babu Jagjivan Ram organised the *harijan* on one hand, on the other hand he also cautioned them against the British policy of reserved constituencies. At the time, in Patna under the aegis of the Anti-Untouchability League (founded by Mahatma Gandhi) a meeting was organised wherein Dr. Rajendra Prasad was invited as the chief guest. Beside other eminent personalities, Babu Jagjivan Ram was also invited there as a

speaker. In the meeting, Babu Jagjivan Ram remarked, "The admonitions of upper-caste Hindus, to quit non-vegetarian food and liquor, to live hygienically, will not work any more. Today the *dalits* are demanding not sermons but good behaviour and this demand will have to be accepted. Not words but concrete actions are needed. Mohammad Ali Jinnah has exhorted the Muslims to form a separate country. Dr. Ambedkar has demanded the arrangement of separate constituencies for the untouchables. I am against all religious conversions. The untouchables are Hindus. We were born as Hindus and shall die so. We have created the nation and not vice versa. This is our nation, Indians only shall have to attempt the unification of India. Mahatma Gandhi... among other things, has also decided that... untouchability shall have to be eliminated. All have strongly supported this Congress proposal. It has given new hope to the oppressed classes... I also vow that for this (the implementation of the proposal) I shall not hesitate in making sacrifices. We shall have to collectively oppose the unjust and untimely demands that some people have made, to the British rulers, during the freedom struggle.... We shall have to rouse the society against religious conversions. Practice of discrimination (against the lower castes) shall have to be given up. We shall have to unite people of all religions and castes in this fight for the freedom of the country."[5]

When Dr. Rajendra Prasad heard this patriotic speech by Babu Jagjivan Ram, he was impressed enough to ask him to accompany him to the reception organised in honour of Mahatma Gandhi's arrival at Bombay after participation in the Second Round Table conference in London. At Bombay, Babu Jagjivan Ram accompanied Dr. Rajendra Prasad to participate in the function. Mahatma Gandhi was already familiar with Babu Jagjivan Ram's ideas since Dr. Rajendra Prasad had informed him about the distinguished services of Babu Jagjivan Ram. Mahatma Gandhi entrusted him with the responsibility of Harijan Sevak Sangh. Babu Jagjivan Ram accepted this work gladly and thus become directly associated with Mahatma Gandhi, freedom movement and program of upliftment of oppressed class.

Mahatma Gandhi focussed his attention on the problems of *dalits* and in May 1933 announced a 21 days fast, to cleanse the psyche of his followers towards the *harijan.* He also postponed the civil disobedience movement for a year and was released from prison.

To secure for the untouchables, their rightful place in the society and raise their economic standard, Mahatma Gandhi founded the Anti-Untouchability League on 30 September 1930[6]. When he began addressing as *harijan*, several castes termed as untouchables, in November 1930, the name of this organisation was changed thereupon, to Harijan Sevak Sangh. The objectives of this Sangh were quite comprehensive but its main aim was to bring about changes in the mindset of the upper castes according to Mahatma Gandhi's idea and strengthen the freedom movement to oust the British from India. At the time Mahatma Gandhi compared *harijan* to cows to which Babu Jagjivan Ram objected, in his letter, writing that to consider *harijan* as cows is to imply that they are to be shown mercy. Gandhi immediately replied in his letter to him that he did not mean the statement in an offensive way, but that *harijan* symbolised mildness and tolerance[7].

At the time, Hindu Mahasabha was making praiseworthy endeavours to reduce the influence of casteism in the country. On 31 December 1935, the seventeenth session of the Hindu Mahasabha was organised at Lucknow under the chairmanship of Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya. The main agenda was to frame a policy on the subject of *harijan* to prevent their conversion from Hinduism. Babu Jagjivan Ram also participated in the meeting. Several speakers expressed their opinions. Ultimately, it was agreed that *harijan* are an integral part of Hindu religion and they should be persuaded at all costs, to not relinquish the Hindu religion. In his presidential speech, Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya stated, "*harijan* should not relinquish Hindu religion. I will raise their foot-dust to my forehead."[8] On the occasion, he also spoke about Babu Jagjivan Ram's services towards *harijan* welfare and praised his work in protecting Hindu religion and linking *harijan* to it. The foundations of Hinduism could be strengthened as a result of Mahamana Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya's untiring efforts.

The Government of India Act was implemented in August 1935. It had been framed according to the recommendations of the Simon Commission and the second as well as the third Round Table conferences. This Act satisfied but few. The Congress branded it as "totally disappointing".

Babu Jagjivan Ram was working as the president of All India Depresed Classes League. As a leader of the oppressed classes, he was constantly pondering upon ways to arrange free access also of the *harijan* to public places, temples, eating-places, wells and schools. He desired equal rights for all. Caste or religion based distinctions between human beings were unjust, inhuman and an affront to God as well.

In August 1936, Babu Jagjivan Ram organised a huge rally at Lucknow, under the aegis of All India Depressed Classes League. Mahatma Gandhi inaugurated it while Babu Jagjivan Ram presided over it. In his speech there, Gandhi told *harijan* about the British rulers' basic policy of 'divide and rule'. He observed that "the entire British conspiracy is that they want to divide the Indians, in the name of religions, castes and languages and want to strengthen their administrative stranglehold over us. The British have plotted to separate *harijan* from us. I also frequently tell the muslim brethren to take what they wish to. India is yours too but understand the British trickery. This is not the time to err. The fight for freedom is of all Indians. This war is not of a religion or caste in particular."[9].

On the occasion, in his presidential speech, Babu Jagjivan Ram observed, "on the basis of complexion, colour, type of hair and body built marking an area separately, it cannot be said that the race of people of a particular area is pure. Beside, it has been definitely proved that caste components are not determinant factors of a person's abilities, inferiority or superiority. Actually, what matters is the sentiments that link people together viz caste sentiments, caste customs, caste conduct, caste-language, these are the influential elements to break traditions. Mahatma Gandhi's influence has, in a short span of time only, slackened and made

flexible, those basic constraints between caste and religion which had arrested the popularity of Hinduism. This has come about since the popular Hindu religion based on separatism and distinctions, disintegration and division, now has to develop a responsible attitude of cohesion in the society and has to adopt the principle of equality by commitment.... We belong to this country. Under Mahatma Gandhi's leadership, we are with him in the struggle for independence of India. The acceptance of *harijan* in Hindu religion has aroused the faith of this major community. We support Mahatma Gandhi."[10]

In this way, Babu Jagjivan Ram sought support and devoted cooperation for Mahatma Gandhi for the ongoing freedom struggle in the country from not only the people of a particular province but the *harijan* from different provinces in the country. On one hand, in his heart, he devotedly harboured the irrepressible desire to reform the socio-economic conditions of the *harijan,* while on the other hand, full of patriotism, he strove constantly to preserve national integrity by opposing the very idea of the *harijan* relinquishing Hinduism.

In accordance with the Government of India Act 1935, elections were declared in 1936. Babu Jagjivan Ram's intense zeal and untiring efforts had made the All India Depressed Classes League's work so extensive that through its medium, he decided to field his associates in the election. In view of the extensive work and fame of the League, the question was not only as to whether the elections be contested but the primary need of the hour also was that names of the *harijan* eligible for franchise, be there in the electoral roll. It was equally essential to provide them information about the voting process. To find a solution to these issues, Babu Jagjivan Ram deposed before Bihar's then Reforms Minister, Mansfield, on the topic of election-related problems.

In a letter to his wife (dated 20.11.1935), he wrote, "I had deposed in Ranchi. The issue is totally political. I feel that you may not understand this now. Explaining in letters may not aid comprehension. Doing so in person may help you understand. The

topics for deposition were to determine constituencies for the untouchables for elections to the provincial Assembly; decide the voting procedure; make arrangements so that at the time of voting, upper castes may not use allurement and atrocities upon the oppressed classes voters and to downgrade franchise eligibility from Matric to Middle-pass for oppressed castes. The provincial governments have prepared a draft on all these issues and from abroad, a commission had come to check as to whether or not, the government draft is acceptable to the public and if not then what changes does the public require. In our province, the representatives from oppressed castes, labour, Muslims and Christians were present. I was there, from the *dalit*. The commission had come only to investigate. It had no decision making authority. It will submit its report to parliament which will take a decision thereupon. The commission will submit its report by January-February and it will take two to three years, to know the parliament's decision. Let us see what they decide. It seemed so, from the commission's attitude that it agrees with several points that I made, although I had harshly criticised the provincial government draft, impressing upon the commission that it is misleading and false yet the provincial government is not ready to concede defeat. Let us see how, the tide turns?....."[11].

The situation was changing. The Congress was much impressed with the successful result of the socialist build-up in the Soviet Union. The Congress leaders supported the Soviet Union. They also praised Spain's struggle against fascism. Congress also completely supported the stand of the freedom-fighters in China and Abyssinia.

In 1937, Babu Jagjivan Ram founded the Khetihar Majdoor Sabha (landless labour society).[12] It worked with the prime objectives of ensuring fair-wages to the agricultural-labourers, arrangement of basic education for their children, organising the labourers, reforming their financial conditions, raising voice against the land-owners atrocities and efforts for the elimination of the *zamindari* system. With these aims in view, the first meeting of this organisation under the chairmanship of Babu Jagjivan Ram was held at Haripura where the Congress was also holding a session at the time. Khetihar

Majdoor Sabha's program influenced a large section of the society but some feudal families of Gujarat opposed it. The credit for managing this Sabha goes to Babu Jagjivan Ram's undiminished zeal. None could have envisaged that the illiterate and barely literate agricultural labourers could become organised and united so quickly. For several years, this Sabha made solid contributions and proved helpful in improving the lot of the labourers, mostly *harijan*.

It is pertinent to mention here that while on one hand Babu Jagjivan Ram fostered the feeling of unity by organising the agricultural labourers, on the other hand, he did the same also for the poor *harijan* labourers in cities. He fought against atrocities on *dalit* labourers in the villages of the country by organising them. In the situation, he called upon the rural labourers as well, to play an active role in the freedom movement and advised them to work as loyal soldiers under Mahatma Gandhi's leadership.

Intensely involved in the work of All India Depressed Classes League, on 12 July 1937, Babu Jagjivan Ram organised a huge rally of its provincial branch in Gopalganj, Bihar, inviting Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Krishna Singh and Anugraha Narayana Singh. The respected guests analysed and praised the progress of the Harijan Sevak Sangh, devoted to improving the situation of *dalit*. In his presidential address, Babu Jagjivan Ram, drew attention to the dismal conditions of the *dalit*, observing that they were lagging far behind in the social arena and their financial progress is negligible. Despite Mahatma Gandhi's call to eliminate untouchability, the upper castes were reluctant to accept them. There was barely any educational advancement among the *dalit*. He felt that there was a need to create a new environment to provide equal oppurtunities to all poor *harijan* in the country, free education for the *harijan* children and financial aid for them through scholarships, provision of books and other reading material, hostels for the *harijan* children etc. Without accomplishing these tasks, the educational development of *harijan* children was impossible. For the fiscal progress of *harijan*, it is quite necessary that they be encouraged to perform all type of skilled and unskilled jobs. In this regard, it was essential that small-scale industries be promoted and if possible, provided financial assistance.

He stated, "90 per cent of our brethren work in fields. What to say of labourers, it would be more apt to call them slaves. If you want to view the vestiges of the slavery system, go to a village and observe the man who wields the plough. He is compelled to pawn himself with a farmer, for bare subsistance wages. He cannot go to another village to work for better wages. Should he dare to do so, there is an arrangement in place, to inflict atrocities. Abolition of *zamindari* cannot end such exploitation. Land redistribution shall have to be done among those who actually work on the land."[13]

In his book, 'Caste Challenge In India', Babu Jagjivan Ram writes, "progress is inherent in the idea that we extend our social horizons and generate awareness in social life. Definitely, this will work towards promoting the ideals of high social form. The social consciousness of the people caught in the endless cobweb of casteism, is nearly nil. Untill the misarrangement of casteism is eliminated, it is impossible to establish a society that is based on the sentiment of uniformity."[14]

The same year a session of the All India Depressed Classes League also took place at Champaran district in the province of Bihar. A large number of people participated in it. There, Babu Jagjivan Ram on the basis of his intensive thinking on the current socio-economic circumstances of the *dalit*, made several suggestions for their uplift which in the form of a draft were submitted to the government.

Evaluating the economic and social progress of certain castes, Babu Jagjivan Ram observed, "it cannot be tolerated that the *dalit* be pushed back. Equal status in society is their birthright. There is no power on earth that can snatch this right from them. They shall have to claim it at any cost. No matter what the form of government is, *harijan* participation in the political order is essential. Necessity is the mother of invention. More serious the nature of needs, more shall be the increase in attempts to address it. If the fulfillment of needs on the basis of geographical and caste factors in social order is contemplated, it emerges that a particular caste, in the form of a group, wants full representation of its social representatives in

power. This is why the socio-economic problems of the *harijan* have attracted them seriously to political affiliations."[15]

Babu Jagjivan Ram said, the country has fully supported Congress in the elections but this is limited only to the political matters. It has brought about no difference, either in the country's or upper caste Hindu's attitude. The reactionary powers in the society are still quite strong and established firmly. If, due to increasing feelings of self-awareness and self-respect and its expression among *dalit*, some conflict arose between them and the upper-caste Hindus, it will not surprise me."[16]

Babu Jagjivan Ram was then living in a rented house at Macchua Toli in Patna city. He had emerged as a top leader of thousands of *harijan* in the country yet he travelled frequently to his home town Chandwa. Gradually his fame increased. Functionaries and his followers used to come to meet him from all corners of the country. Macchua Toli residence began to appear small for the growing multitude of visitors and Babuji shifted with his family to a bigger house in Kadamkuan at Patna where on 17 July 1938 a son was born to him. The child was named Suresh Kumar.

Being a sincere and zealous leader, Babuji's work-sphere grew extensively. While incidents of his generosity abound, a case in particular is recounted here. During his Patna stay, as secretary of Bihar province branch of Harijan Sevak Sangh, he was getting barely 75 rupees per month. In this, not only household expenses but transport expenditure was also adjusted. Once when Babu Jagjivan Ram was at home, a youth whom he had never seen before, came to meet him, narrating incidents of his poverty and helplessness. He requested financial assistance to study law. He appeared meritorious and Babu Jagjivan Ram patted his head affectionately, encouraging him to study further. He also humbly told the youth to unabashedly collect 40 rupees per month from his wife for study and meal expenses till his law-graduation was complete. Such a great man, Babu Jagjivan Ram was. Smt. Indrani Jagjivan Ram also cooperated with her husband, under all conditions. Few examples will be found where more than 50 per cent of the income is given away to an unfamiliar student for

education and from the remainder only were the household expenses met, that too, in a house with frequent visitors.

The second world war began in september 1939. Despite the dissent of Congress and other political organisations, the British government dragged India into this war. In the Government of India Act, the Viceroy had been endowed with such powers that he could interfere fully in the administration, not only of the central government but also the provincial governments. The Defence India Act was promulgated whereby the central British government was given powers to frame rules to restrict mass meetings, arrest without warrant and sentence to banishment and even death, anyone, upon violation of law.

Considering the war as totally an imperialistic one, the Congress declared that it will not cooperate in the war in any manner whatsoever until the country is declared independent. It observed: "during the previous world war, the declaration of intent included defending democracy, decision-making power and freedom to several nations. Yet, despite announcing that Britain and France did not want to conquer countries, these victorious powers made slaves of nations and increased the number of their colonies. The present European war, in itself, is the outcome of the despised Versova Treaty and the lack of success of those who brought it about. These people broke promises and thrust imperialistic peace upon the vanquished countries. If the purpose of the war is maintaining status quo, imperialistic domination, annexation, colonialism, vested interest and protection of special privileges, then India is not interested, but if the issue is of democracy or a world order based on it then India is very much interested. A free and democratic India would gladly rub shoulders with other free nations for mutual defence against attacks and for economic cooperation, but it should definitely be between equals and with mutual consent. Therefore, the Executive requests the government to declare, in clear terms, the objectives of war with reference to democracy, imperialism and envisaged new order in particular, how these objectives are to be implemented in India."[17]

The British rulers in India provided no clarification on the questions raised by Congress. The war was spreading fast. France conceded defeat and surrendered. In this regard, the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill declared in the British parliament, House of Commons, "the war is over in France. Now it is the turn of Britain. Come, let us take an oath to consider it our duty that even if the British Commonwealth or the British empire has to fight for a thousand years, the world may still say that this was their golden period."[18]

The British government did agree to the Congress demand for amendments in the Act of 1935, yet it wanted to do so in a manner as would divide the society into several sections of religion, castes and groups. Congress rejected the proposed amendments, which were conducive to the British diplomacy of dividing the country. In such circumstances, Congress, clarifying its position, took a decision, which in the form of a proposal, was sent to the Viceroy. Therein, it was stated that "the Indian public cannot accept anything less than complete independence and in India, only the Indians can well prepare their own constitution."[19]

As decided beforehand by Congress, several elected members of Congress had resigned from the central and provincial governments. The freedom movement gained in momentum. Mahatma Gandhi assumed leadership of Congress again. In November 1940, Congress decided to undertake *Satyagraha*, (truth-force), a unique and disciplined effort towards gaining freedom and dignity of the country. To implement the call for individual *Satyagraha*, Vinoba Bhave became the first *satyagraha-activist* courting arrest from the Pavnar Ashram. Thereafter, the arrests came in a rush as about twenty thousand people from all over India courted arrest. On Mahatma Gandhi's call for individual *satyagraha*, *harijan* and other oppressed classes too played a praiseworthy role in making this movement a success under Babu Jagjivan Ram's leadership.

Babu Jagjivan Ram had become a national leader of the *dalit*. Though well respected among all religious, social and political organisations, he was much attached to the dalit community. While

on one hand his concern was to find ways to connect *dalit* to the Congress (since Congress policies, beside being pro-freedom, were also for *dalit* uplift), on the other hand, unlike some separatists, Babu Jagjivan Ram did not want the British ploy of separating *dalit*, from Hindus to succeed.

Mrs. Indrani Jagjivan Ram wrote, "All India Depressed Classes League, a national body of *dalit* communities, supported the Congress on the question of war and independence. Its executive met under Babu Jagjivan Ram's chairmanship on 24 October 1939 at Allahabad and passed a resolution that Congress is the only organisation which has the right to represent various communities and sections of the country. Rejecting the Poona resolution will harm the country and the *dalit* community. Although, the League was participating in the nationalist movement under his leadership and supported Congress on the issue of independence, yet it was also carrying out admirably its obligations towards the *dalit* communities. A demand was incorporated in the resolution that proportionate representation and security be provided to the *dalit*, in government jobs and elected bodies."[19] In getting the Congress to accept the demand for representation in government jobs as well as elected bodies according to percentage of the total number of *dalit,* Babu Jagjivan Ram proved his wisdom, foresight and commitment, playing a pivotal role in the progress and emanicipation of *dalit*. He linked them to the freedom movement and motivated *dalit* to participate actively in individual *Satyagraha* for the freedom of the country. Due to his inspiration, many *dalit* gladly became martyrs for the cause of independence of India."[20]

In December 1940, Babu Jagjivan Ram bought a plot of land at Kadamkuan in Patna and construction began there. The house was not even completed, when to fructify Mahatma Gandhi's call for individual *Satyagraha*, on 10 December 1940, he decided to opt for it and gave prior notice to the District Collector of Arrah about this. In Arrah town, a large number of people gathered to hear Babu Jagjivan Ram. He delivered an impressive and impassioned speech, after which he was arrested and kept at Arrah prison for sometime, before being sent to the Hazaribagh prison.

His being imprisoned at Arrah spread political awareness there. His elder brother Sant Lal found the event worthy of glory and said, "Jagjivan is in prison for the country. He has brought fame to our family and lineage. We should be proud of this."[21]

Babu Jagjivan Ram's imprisonment for individual *satyagraha* was a symbol of respectable representation of *dalit*, in the freedom movement. From Central Jail, Hazaribagh, on 18 December 1940, he wrote his first letter to his wife. It was duly censored by the prison officials, but some excerpts are given thus, "By now, you would have come to know from my brother that I proceeded from Arrah on 12-12-40 and reached Hazaribagh on 13-12-40. Today is the eighth day of this prison life. It is a new experience for me. Prison is a world in itself. It is a state in itself. There is a lot to learn here and I hope that I will only gain some insight. Anyway, my elder brother was worked up, he still would be. There was anxiety in your heart too though you repressed it, but I gauged the concern. You were and still would be worried much about my diet and health. Therefore, I will tell you my routine in detail. I have been kept in a room (called, cell, in prison language). There is adequate light and air. An iron bed, a table, a chair, a commode, a pitcher and a bucket adorn this room. Oh yes, there is also, a mosquito net and blankets. Movement is permitted in almost all places within the huge prison boundaries. I walk almost a mile and return to find the breakfast ready. It consists of two eggs, two pieces of toast, some pudding and *ghugni* (a local dish). Yes, I also take a cup or half, of tea. By the time I finish breakfast, it is nearly half-past-eight. From then till 10 a.m., time goes by in spinning wheel and gossip. An ordinary prisoner is provided to serve two of us. Searchlight, Statesman and Vishwamitra, these newspapers are provided. Lunch time is about noon or half-past 12 p.m. In the courtyard, blankets are spread and we 20-22 people sit with our plate, bowl and glass (allotted from prison). *Roti* (Wheat-bread), rice, lentils, two types of vegetables, chutney and curd, food is delicious. After lunch, I rest for a while. Before 4 p.m. I spin wheel if at leisure. After returning from jail, I shall not have to seek you out for explaining Urdu, but will comprehend it myself. Dinner is ready by half-past-seven or 8 p.m. and we

partake of it. Every alternate night, there is meat or fish beside *roti* (wheat-bread) and vegetables. Then at 9 p.m., the prison-life becomes restricted to the cell-life and I become the sole-owner or prisoner, however you want to view it, of my cell. I read or write from 9 p.m. till 10 p.m. or 11 p.m. I am reading some new books and am also writing. While doing so, only the sound of the warden's boots disturbs the stillness. When I feel sleepy, I pick up and drink the glass of milk from the table and keeping the book aside, turn the lamp down, restricting even cell-life to the world of blanket. I sleep soundly. If I am not sleepy enough, memories of Munnu's surface. In solitude, imagination comes to the rescue, with its aid and remembering Munnu's dance and songs, playfulness and prank, I fall asleep losing the consciousness of the external world. What a sequential harmony, from outer world to the prison world limiting to the cell-world then the blanket's world and finally detachment from world, even if only for sometime. If only, from this order, could be gained the power and means to follow the path to actual emancipation, life would become so simple, beautiful and spontaneous! Anyway, let us set this intense element of philosophy aside. If I awaken from sleep, as it is not allowed to go outside or read, so while lying down or sitting up, I enjoy the devotional songs. Sometimes, even in my non-believer heart, old vibrations surge and without volition, I also become lost in the lyrics of the songs... '*Keshav Kahi na jaye ke kahiye*' or '*jake priy na Raam Vaidehi*'. At 6 a.m., the gates open and the same routine, as stated above, begins. Days are passing by, pleasantly. There is no cause to worry for me. Read out all this to my brother also, so he too will understand. Take special care of Munnu and look after him carefully. Keep writing to me every week. In this, there should be no delay. I will also write every week about my well-being."[22]

Not only do these letters reflect the prevailing conditions, but also indicate Babu Jagjivan Ram's in-depth grasp of social philosophy. In his letter to his wife, sent in February 1941, he wrote, "my routine is the very same. I just try to bring some novelty in that, by minor changes. There is a set limit, everything has to be within that. Where would newness come from? If this

limit had been set by oneself, may be then it would not appear so distasteful. This is the basic difference between bondage and freedom. To limit the wilfulness of desires is termed as restriction whether it is implemented with regard to spirituality or worldliness or in a moral way. The freedom of a parrot in a gold cage is as restrictive as in an iron cage. Both yearn equally for freedom. However, there is also a kind of pleasure involved, if by the restriction of one, others are benefited or there is a possibility of their welfare. For such a noble purpose, so many in the world have embraced bondages for the good of others, teaching them the lesson of emancipation. Jesus Christ, Prophet Mohammad, Swami Dayanand... The lives of these saints is in itself a noble teaching. All have forsaken their ego, given up their family and loved ones, for universal good. If one could emulate their example, sacrifices and ideals, even to some extent, one should consider oneself lucky... Today in the world, only a few ideologies find a place in political sphere or administration– Imperialism, Nazism, Fascism, Socialism and Communism. There is not much of a difference between socialism and communism. Both share the objective that all essential commodities should be available to all in the society and country. All should have equal civil rights, and disparities within society should end. Today, despite hard work, one does not get enough to eat or sufficient clothes to cover oneself with, while another without lifting a finger, gets to bathe in milk. So many, capable of working, but jobless, suffer untimely death from starvation. The aim of socialism and communism is that all should be employed as per their calibre and all be provided provisions according to needs. The nation's property should belong to the nation, each citizen should have a right to it. In such a system, when the nation fulfills the needs of each individual, none shall need or aspire to own personal property. This, in brief, is the definition of socialism and communism."[23]

It is but natural that when a husband writes to his wife, he seeks information about other family members as well. A father's tender memories of his young child are quite moving, more so, when the father is imprisoned as a freedom fighter. Excerpts from such a letter that Babu Jagjivan Ram wrote to his wife on 11 March 1941

from Central Jail at Hazaribagh are given thus, "My blessings to Munnu. My respectful greetings to my revered mother. Greetings to my elder brother and sister-in-law. Things are fine here. I hope all is well there too. I received in time, your letter of 24 February 1941. It gladdened my heart, relieving my anxiety. I was happy to know that Munnu is well again. I worry most about Munnu. Here the time is passing by as usual. Much time is spent on the spinning wheel. Also, there is no dearth of friends and colleagues here. Chatting, deliberations and amusement takes up much time. When I am alone in my cell at night, reading something, remembrances of Munnu's pranks surge forth. I fall asleep, thinking...Yesterday, while strolling in the evening, a strange storm arose in my heart, upon hearing the lisping voices of children, humming songs, from the quarter adjoining the prison boundary (where the prison doctor lives). They could not be seen but their voices were enough. Like a small pebble sufficient to create waves in a peaceful and quiet sea, similarly those voices moved me. Munnu would also be lisping and humming, even singing like this. How lovely, how cute and how engrossing! Such feelings churned in my heart for a long time, then I forgot.. Forgetfulness is also a useful instrument in human life. If we were capable of recalling all conversations and incidents, then it is difficult to say whether our life would be happier or even more miserable. To remember all things at all times, would make life more listless, hard to bear and uneasy. Anyway, in my life at present, forgetfulness is of assistance. I have undertaken activities as a man of action and as for you, Lakshman's sacrifice, zeal and devotion to duty was praiseworthy, worth emulation, but Urmila's sacrifice was of a higher level and more intense than Lakshman's. Is it not so?... Worry! It seems that worry is the eternal companion of human beings. While one is attached to the world, society or family, getting rid of worries appears difficult if not impossible. As for being sad, you are well aware of my nature that even in difficult situations, I do not become unhappy. But I do get worried, definitely, sometimes"[24].

Babu Jagjivan Ram took pains to get to the basic root of any problem, to explore solutions. From student life, his approach to

a question was scientific and logical. From Central Jail, Hazaribagh, he wrote another letter to his wife on 28 March 1943, which highlights his dutifulness and also elaborates on the structure of socialism: "...Whoever is of a somewhat sensitive disposition and has understood the prevailing circumstances in the country, even a bit, cannot but ponder so... Any action has two causes, direct and indirect. The importance of one is no less than that of the other. Similarly, if I am the direct cause, you are the indirect one. In such matters, I consider you no less than myself. When the time and situations are opportune for directness, I will be the first person to promote you. For now, keep performing your line of duty... You have understood well what you have read of socialism. There are always disparities in this world. Some are natural but most are created by the society. Due to the prevailing concepts of religion, ethics and economy, the disparities in society are ever increasing. These are causing distress to crore of beings. If the differences are analysed scientifically, we reach the conclusion that fiscal greed is the basis of all disparities. Those who hold the reins of society, have made rules to benefit their own class and the interpretation of religious matters as well as economic issues vest in their class only. The entire society is moulded with a view to benefit a class in particular. Consequently, there is unfair distribution of economic gains in the society. Previously or presently, the conflicts in the world are all about changing the economic equations. Socialism is the name of the process whereby financial profits are distributed in the interest of the society, in the interest of each individual in the society."[25]

It was Babu Jagjivan Ram's fervent desire to bring socialism to independent India. Under British rule, such an aspiration would have remained only a dream. Former President of India, Dr. Shankar Dayal Sharma, in his article has illustrated the socialist structure of India and its explanation in Babu Jagjivan Ram's own words thus, "... In our Indian socialism, the primary requirement was and still is that all be provided equal oppurtunities. What is socialism? There is no fixed answer to this question being asked for quite sometime now. Is socialism what Karl Marx wrote in *Das Kapital* while sitting in the British Museum? Are only Engel's thoughts,

socialism? Is Lenin's definition the true exposition of socialism, or are Mao's ideas on this, the definition of socialism? If all these concepts symbolise socialism, then would it suit our country? And Gandhism is also socialism. The dream of *Ramrajya* that Mahatma Gandhi envisaged was also a form of socialism only, a system where none is high or low in position, none rich or poor, none high or low in caste hierarchy. In Mahatma Gandhi's *Ramrajya*, lay the true socialist economic arrangement. Those who talk only of scientific socialism of the West, are not socialists but only boast of being such... In Indian philosophy, man had a glorious position though it did not last for long and today nowhere exists the caste discriminations as are practised here. In such a scenario, if we talk only of economic equality, it will not be socialism in its true sense. For true socialism, a social revolution should precede the economic one. How many among those who speak of socialism, are bothered about those who plough the land?."[26]

In this way, Babu Jagjivan Ram's idea of socialism was in accordance with the concept of *Ramrajya* as Mahatma Gandhi espoused it. On 10 October 1941, Babu Jagjivan Ram was released from the Central Jail, Hazaribagh and he again immersed himself in work as before.

At the time, there was upheaval being wrought on the international scene. Germany had defeated France. It also began bombarding the British territories. On 22 June 1941, it attacked the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, Japan, on 06 December 1941 attacked the American air base of Pearl Harbour. In response, America declared war and jumped into the fray too. The war, untill now limited to Europe, assumed the dimensions of a world war.

Thus, while Great Britain and her allies were fighting for their survival in India, thousands under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi were agitating for independence from British rule. It was the time when the courageous freedom fighter, Subhash Chandra Bose left India to raise abroad, the bugle of India's freedom from British hegemony.

Great Britain's many ally imperialist countries accepted in earnest the magnitude of India's resistance against British rule, asking the

then Prime Minister of England, Winston Churchill, to consider independence for India. However, Churchill vehemently refused such suggestions. On 08 March 1942, Japan conquered Rangoon (Yangoon). Ultimately, the growing urgency of the second world war, persuaded Churchill to soften his stance and negotiate with Indian leaders. Consequently, a delegation was announced under the chairmanship of Sir Staford Cripps. It is also known by the name of Cripps Mission. On 22 March 1942, Sir Cripps reached India to hold talks with the representatives of several organisations and religious bodies beside Congress. However, Cripps favoured the current British management in place at the time, since he had to hold talks with the Indian leaders only within the framework of the draft on probable issues that he had brought from England, and had to return empty-handed from India on 12 April 1942.

The freedom movement was deeply rooted now and gaining in strength with each passing day. From July 05 to 16, 1942, the executive session of Congress was held at Vardha in which Mahatma Gandhi spiritedly exhorted, "....The time has come when breaking the several years old chain of slavery, Congress should demand strongly, 'Britishers, Quit India."[27]

Mahatma Gandhi's call electrified the nation by mentally preparing all for the holy war of freedom. On 07 August 1942, a meeting of Congress executive was held in Bombay wherein representatives from all over India participated. Babu Jagjivan Ram also took part in it. On 08 August, 1942, a resolution was passed thus, "...For defending India's right to freedom, All India Congress Committee decides to begin a non-violent public movement on a large scale and on every possible basis so that the country can put to use the entire non-violent power that it has conserved during the last twenty-three years of peaceful struggle. This movement will be undertaken under Mahatma Gandhi's leadership. This committee requests him to assume leadership and take such steps as he considers suitable in this regard to lead the nation."[28]

Immediately after the proposal was passed, Mahatma Gandhi in his stirring speech, said, "I understake the responsibility for

leading you, not as a commander or patron, but as your humble servant and whosoever can better serve than me, will be considered as the chief servant. I am only the main servant of this country. My conscience dictates that I shall have to take on the world, all by myself. My soul tells me that as long as one has the power to face the world without fear, he is safe, no matter how the world views him. After all, what crime has the Congress committed in demanding freedom for India? Is this demand a mistake? Is it justified to doubt Congress? I hope that England will not do so and nor will the President of America, neither China's chief commander, Marshall Chiang Kai Shek, who is fighting for his existence against the Japanese, contemplate the Congress that way. If all the nations in the world oppose me, if the whole of India seeks to persuade me otherwise, then too, I shall not budge from the set path. I have stepped forward. I shall advance on this path not only for India, but for the whole world."[29]

Meanwhile, to give a concrete shape to the plan for escaping from the Britisher's clutches, on Mahatma Gandhi's call, "Britishers, Quit India", a collective vow had been taken to realize this goal at the meeting. From 09 August 1942, the British began arresting prominent leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel, Asaf Ali, Sarojini Naidu, etc. The Congress was declared an illegal organisation. Martial law was imposed and curfew enforced in the major cities. The country was terrorised.

After participating in the Bombay session of Congress, Babu Jagjivan Ram had returned to Patna. To give a concrete shape to the proposed campaign, he organised secret meetings of patriots, in Bihar province, instructing them to follow the path that Mahatma Gandhi had shown. On 19 August 1942, the British government arrested him once again. He was kept for sometime at Bankipur prison, then was shifted to the Hazaribagh Jail[30]. In this regard, Kamlapati Tripathi wrote, in his article, "Jagjivan Babu's life has been one of sacrifices and ascetism. During the course of freedom-movement, he has also suffered severe hardships in prison."[31]

Recalling those days, Smt. Indrani Jagjivan Ram wrote that after Babu Jagjivan Ram "went to prison, Patna city, was terrorised by the Britishers. From seven p.m. until six a.m., curfew was imposed. People could not move out of their houses. At the time, the British government was fighting a dual battle, one in India, and the other international. The British government was in disarray. It was fighting too many battles at once and was caught on the wrong foot in its war against Germany. In India, Mahatma Gandhi's stance became a severe headache for it. Meanwhile, it was no less bothered by the Indian National Army of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, in Burma (Myannar). In India, war was a big issue, everybody was talking about it. At such a time, it is not known as to how many perished in the holy fire of India's fight for its freedom. It is not known as to how many lost everything, having to live in penury. On the other hand, the British bureaucrats and traders were minting money. They were rolling in luxury. Several opportunists had gained financially from the adversities of others... In this way, during this war, some were perishing while others were flourishing."[32]

Many national leaders, leading this movement in their provinces, were imprisoned. The British cycle of oppression continued. As a result, the arrest of their leaders aroused public ire in the entire country. The masses did not take the challenge of the imperialists lying down. The public attacked railway stations, damaged railway tracks, attacked and set on fire the police posts, uprooted telephone and electricity lines and attempted to destroy government property. The government retaliated by coming down heavily, seeking to crush the movement, firing tear-gas shells and firing. It only worsened the situation by hurting public sentiments. Then began an open conflict on roads, the police and military against the freedom fighters."[33]

From Hazaribagh Central Jail, Babu Jagjivan Ram regularly wrote to his wife, other family members and friends. In July 1943 he informed, "I am not keeping well. For several days now, the fever is not receding and I have lost weight."[34] His health had suddenly deteriorated in those days and he was not responding to

treatment. After fifteen months of imprisonment, Babuji was released by the British government due to sickness, on 05 October 1943."[35]

For a while, Babu Jagjivan Ram stayed at home and then at his kin's place at Shimla for climate-change. When his health improved, he began to work hard again. Beside striving for Independence of India, he also had to provide a new framework, a new plan, for *dalit* uplift, and leadership for the nation's integrity.

Prior to the Quit India movement, as the President of the eighth session of the All India Depressed Classes League at Meerut, Babu Jagjivan Ram had stated, "we are fighting for the freedom of the country but alongside we are also striving for the emancipation of our *dalit* community. We are committed to end the social, religious and economic exploitation and seek equality for ourselves in the Hindu society." Appealing for caution against the British policy to divide the *dalit*, he added further, "The British government wants to divide the oppressed classes. It trusts only the pro-government and nodding individuals among *harijan*. The *harijan* should neither relinquish the anti-war nationalist ideology nor contemplate assistance in war declaration." Repeating his demand for reservation to *harijan* in the Legislative Assembly and government jobs, he criticised the fundamentalism of upper caste Hindus.[36]

When Babu Jagjivan Ram was imprisoned at Hazaribagh Jail in December 1942, the All India Depressed Classes League organised a session at Amritsar. Babu Jagjivan Ram's concern for *dalit* welfare and his definite views on the rights of *dalit* along with the freedom movement in the country were well known and he was chosen the president of the League even in–absentia.

The All India Depressed Classes League's devotion to the country and its dutifulness was in accordance with Mahatma Gandhi's directions to oppose the British rulers. It did not curry favour with the separatists. Therefore the British government banned the League's session that was to be held at Kanpur in 1943. The situation grew grim. The British ploy to divide India had become more complex. In June 1944, C. Rajgopalachari, prepared an

alternative framework to prevent the division of the country. Meanwhile although several talks were held between Mahatma Gandhi and Jinnah on the question of partition of the country the latter remained adamantly in its favour. Babu Jagjivan Ram presided over the executive meeting of the All India Depressed Classes League which came up with a memorandum for the Sapru Committee. Besides other things, it mentioned that, "in their recommendations, neither Mahatma Gandhi nor C. Rajgopalachari had paid much attention to the *harijan* community. For correct dimensions of the country, it is not only desirable but extremely necessary that in any agreement between the Congress and the Muslim league, full patronage be extended to the *harijan*. The demand of a separate nation for the *harijan* is unacceptable to us but any such constitution or agreement in which the interests of *harijan* are not guarded well is also not acceptable."[37]

Deposing on the issue of *dalit* emanicipation before the Sapru Committee, Babu Jagjivan Ram said that, "the joint elections under the Poona Pact should be held since the ultimate objective of the oppressed castes, is to unite the Hindu society." He spoke of putting an end to the system of primary election procedure as it was a tedious and expensive process. He was of the opinion that in elections, to be considered as an actual representative, the *dalit* candidate should secure at least 25 per cent of the total votes cast by the oppressed castes."[38]

In Babu Jagjivan Ram's endeavours for *dalit* development and attainment of independence for India, can be found an admirable combination of unlimited zeal, devotion, courage and determination along with pragmatism and discretion.

Seven years after the birth of Babu Jagjivan Ram's eldest son Suresh, a daughter Meira, was born on 31 March 1945. Meira has been devoted to *dalit* welfare. Talented gracious and, selfless with firm determination, Meira has taken forth Babu her father's endeavours.

In India, the British administration was overwrought and the British policy of repression too was on the verge of failure when power changed hands in England and Clement Atlee

became its Prime Minister. Lord Wavell was appointed as Viceroy to India, with declaration of elections to the central and provincial legislative assemblies. Atlee and Wavell, both reassured Indians that in the post-election scenario, work would begin on drafting a new constitution for India and organising an executive in accordance with it.

Beside several national-level political bodies, the All India Scheduled Castes Federation and the All India Depressed Classes League also took part in the general elections. Under the leadership of Babu Jagjivan Ram, the All India Depressed Classes League, fought elections on Congress seats. As a result, on 123 seats out of the total 151 seats, *dalit* candidates fielded by Congress were successful. Babu Jagjivan Ram was re-elected unopposed. All India Scheduled Castes Federation could manage only two seats. Candidates of other parties were victorious on the remaining seats. The election results proved how the *dalits* of India supported Babu Jagjivan Ram.

On 24 March 1946, the Cabinet Mission from England reached India. It included Sir Stafford Cripps, Alexander and Lord Patrick Lawrence. The aim of this Mission was not only to confer with Indian leaders for a decision on the process to grant complete autonomy to India but also to determine the democratic objectives for its new constitution. After deliberations with the top leaders of other parties, the Cabinet Mission conferred with Dr. B. R. Ambedkar from the All India Scheduled Castes Federation, about the status of *dalit*. The Federation also submitted a memorandum to the Commission.

Meanwhile, on 05 April 1946, Babu Jagjivan Ram received a telegram from the Mission stating "you may elaborate on the national *dalit* perspective before the Cabinet Commission by presenting yourself at the Viceroy House."[39] At the time, Babu Jagjivan Ram was the president of the All India Depressed Classes League. Babu Jagjivan Ram enjoyed full confidence of the *dalit* community as the results of the general elections had succeeded in proving conclusively.

In its meeting on 02 April 1946, the All India Depressed Classes

League, drafted a memorandum for submission to the Cabinet Commission. Therein, attention was directed especially to the fact that "from the religious and cultural viewpoints, inspite of being a part of the Hindu society, the *dalit* communities possess political authority of their own. Therefore, while they are lagging behind, from social, religious, political and educational perspectives, special privileges should be bestowed, to guard their rights and interests and these privileges be extended untill such communities catch up with the so-called higher classes among Hindus and become fully integrated in the Hindu society."[40]

In this memorandam it was mentioned, in particular that the Congress is the only vast institution, in which all the religions and castes are represented, and the *dalit* communities support it in freedom movement. This memorandum was given to the Cabinet Mission. Also, Babu Jagjivan Ram, as the president of the All India Depressed Classes League met the Cabinet Commission on 08 April 1946 on its invitation. He was accompanied by the vice-president of this League, Radhanath Das, (a Member of State Legislature and a Minister) and Prithvi Singh Azad, (a member of State Legislature). The meeting continued for an hour and a half. In accordance with the memorandum prepared by the All India Depressed Classes League, during the conversation Babu Jagjivan Ram put forth several suggestions for improving the situation of the *dalit* communities and safeguarding their self-esteem. He emphasised, "*harijan* are Hindus, their religion is Hinduism so they will always remain Hindus only."[41] Babu Jagjivan Ram so impressed the Cabinet Commission that some separatists who, had been swept against the idea of freedom lost their credibility.

The atmosphere in the country was ripe for gaining freedom. As per the directions of the Cabinet Mission, on 02 September 1946, the central interim council of ministers was constituted, under Lord Wavell. Twelve ministers in all were administered the oath of office. Babu Jagjivan Ram took oath as the Labour Minister in this council of ministers. He thus got the first national-level opportunity, to serve the country as a *dalit* representative. In the

perspective of the prevalent circumstances, the oppressed communities, expressing gratitude towards Lord Wavell for including their beloved leader in his council of ministers, termed the event as "a revolutionary and courageous step based on intensive thinking, for the advancement of *dalit* class and elimination of slavery."[42]

A constituent assembly was set up for preparing India's constitution. This was an enormous undertaking. Therefore, under the Constituent Assembly a draft constitution committee was organised. Beside this, four other committees were also established for the job of framing an outline of the constitutional provisions. An ever-watchful sentinel of the country, Babu Jagjivan Ram duly contributed to the work of the committees.

Meanwhile, the Finance Minister in the interim government and the Executive-Secretary of the Muslim League, Liaqat Ali Khan, at a public meeting in Aligarh, on 16 February 1947, commented that the majority community in India was trying hard to grab the authority being relinquished by the British and the Muslim League will never tolerate that the moment one's slavery is shaken off another be thrust on the Muslims.

Under the circumstances, the British Prime Minister, Atlee delivering a statement in the House of Commons on the situation in India on 20 February 1947, admitted that "the uncertain conditions in India are full of dangers. This cannot be allowed to go on for long. The British government wants to transfer its authority in India into responsible hands by June 1948 and our intention is to take the required steps soon for this transfer of power."[43]

As Labour Minister in the interim council Babu Jagjivan Ram had to shoulder heavy reponsibilities. Along with Mahatma Gandhi and other senior leaders, he had to discharge the governmental work in the country but alongside, he was also committed to work for safeguarding the *dalit* rights. Towards this target, as the top *dalit* leader he continously guided and inspired, with grit and dedication, the *dalit* candidates chosen for the Constituent Assembly or elected to the provincial legislatures.

Babu Jagjivan Ram's suggestions were put to Mahatma Gandhi to frame a law for reserved constitutencies in proportion of the population of the *dalit* communities, with regard to the provincial legislatures and at national level, the Constituent Assembly. Mahatma Gandhi not only accepted this proposal but after achievement of Independence, it was incorporated in the Constitution of India, as a constitutional right.[44] On 11 March 1947, in the Central Legislative Council, Home Minister in the interim central council of ministers, Sardar Patel expressed in detail his views on the safeguards necessary for protecting the rights of the scheduled castes. He also pointed out, "we are nearing independence, and whether we like it or not, we should be prepared for it. Under the circumstances, I would want that the scheduled castes should, in all earnestness, equip themselves to shoulder their burden and obligations. Ultimately, they only desire their rightful share and that should be given to them."[45]

Meanwhile, in March 1947, the Muslim League's demand to bifurcate India for a separate nation for the Muslims, gained in strength so much that in the whole country, Hindu-Muslim skirmishes took place. Rawalpindi, Lahore, Taxila, Amritsar and Multan were seriously affected by the violence. Human values were endangered. In such a scenario of destruction and public outrage, the British government appointed Lord Mountbatten to the post of Viceroy of India. He took over charge on 24 March 1947.

To redeem the situation, Lord Mountbatten immediately began discussions with Mahatma Gandhi and other national leaders but Mahatma Gandhi's suggestion to Muslims to live harmoniously with the other communities in independent India, was rejected in toto by the leaders of Muslim League, who insisted on a separate Islamic country, Pakistan. With no other option left the All India Congress Committee had to concede the demand of the Muslim League, for a separate nation. Ultimately, in July 1947, the British Parliament cleared the bill for the independence of India and England's monarch gave his consent to it. In this way, on 14 August 1947, India was partitioned to create Pakistan and on 15 August 1947, India attained freedom.

Babu Jagjivan Ram was instrumental in securing for the *dalit* communities, reservation in proportion to their population in Lok Sabha and the state legislatures as well as government jobs. He inspired, not only the council of ministers but also the architects of the Constitution, to include the provision of reservation for *dalit*, in government jobs under sections 16 and 335.

Babu Jagjivan Ram opined that the socio-economic differences, prevailing from centuries among the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes could be countered probably only by stipulating in the Constitution of India, provisions of reservation in government jobs for them. Considering the culture in the country as foundation, Babu Jagjivan Ram believed that history and prevailing cultural behaviour provided the base for the origin of social conflicts.

In his book *Caste Challenge in India*, Babu Jagjivan Ram writes, "today, our country is undergoing a cultural revolution. There are the problems of casteism and caste distinctions. These issues are so deep and complex that we have to face them daily. We talk of culture, democracy, high human values and ideals, sing songs of civilizations and mechanised as well as economic advancements, but I do believe that untill caste system is annihilated from this country, such talk is of little use. It does not matter what the causes of social conflicts and cultural problems are, we do not have to explore those here. However it is an undisputed fact that in recent years, the level of discontentment has risen in the country. The dissatisfaction is basically an expression of our indifference towards the beliefs of our traditional customs. Is it because of the erosion of our customary values? Is it because we are incapable of embracing the human values as the basis of democracy and the structure of socialism? While dissecting and analysing such questions, we have to keep in mind the fact that if the ideals of social life are not in tandem with the social realities and linked to it then such ideals are merely ordinary illusions. The magnitude of ideal does not matter! It is difficult to correctly practice ideals in life. For example, in the compositions of the great poet Kalidas, the description of the foundation of the social ideals is merely the mention of the events and ideologies prevailing in that ancient historical time period. In his own words, 'the way the movement

of planets in the sky depends on the indications given by God, just so, the warriors of Raghu clan follow the path shown by Manu. Well, the last ruler in the Raghu clan became averse to the path of Manu and died an untimely death, bringing to an end, the rule of the Raghu clan'. These ideals are not only of the great poet, Kalidas but also of the warriors' ways in the society. With reference to the prevalent ideologies and the highly advanced life-flow processes, it would be pertinent to surmise that we cannot accept *Manusmriti* which expounds the law concerning the same type of crime, with different punishments for people of different communities. For this, *Manusmriti* alone is not to be blamed. Actually, the society had reflected it at the time when the words of the king or ruler were cherished as expressions of God. It should not be difficult to accept the truth that the current society is not in a position to accord significance either to warriors' conduct or *Manusmriti*. It is quite useless to repeat time and again that the Indian culture is stable and superior to others in the world. If equal oppurtunities are not provided for the intellectual and physical development of the people and simple means are not available for people to gain knowledge for economic and political development then the stability is of no worth. If the ideals, thoughts, expressions and ways as described in the scriptures the *Upanishad* are being touted as Indian culture, then is it not logical that each individual should have the freedom to espouse the foundation of such a culture by oneself? Engrossed in the in-depth study of the scripture the *Upanishad*, under the influence of ancient culture, a contemporary Brahmin thinker presented a novel idea before the society, claiming that society is the gift of an invisible God. God has bestowed upon the nation, wisdom, power and wealth through the medium of which, the human beings serve the society selflessly. It is the well-established and pious duty of the nation to serve – by body, heart and soul – sincerely, selflessly, physically, thoughtfully and by expression. In this way, at every step in our life, the system of ideals and procedures can be discovered. Here *Vedas* may be illustrated. Except for poetic expressions in a place, of the four classes in society being created from four parts of the body of the God, *Brahma*, nowhere else do we find in the *Vedas*,

social and mental conservatism of this sort. In *Vedas*, we witness an ambitious and healthy pastoral society constantly striving. The stream of history leaves such a society far behind, to create in present age, several alternatives and pertinent social arrangements, pushing out the obsolete ones.

We cannot even imagine re-establishment of the ancient society, let alone re-enacting history. It is neither possible nor in the interest of the society but ideas can be stable. Such a belief is found in the scriptures, the *Vedas* and the *Upanishad.* The society as described therein, cannot be re-created today yet the high ideals contained therein, may become source of inspiration for us. Can a path shown towards firm will, selfless work and human welfare, as explained in the holy Book *Srimad Bhagvad Gita* which Mahatma Gandhi also has put in a nutshell of two words as truth and non-violence, not be the basic aim, of the present scientific era?"[46]

Finding the socio-economic disparities to be the cause of conflict among the people in society, Babu Jagjivan Ram persuaded Mahatma Gandhi and other contemporary national leaders to allocate special privileges for the people of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. He tried his level best to make the education system flexible. He ensured that provisions were in place for scholarships to the scheduled caste and the scheduled tribe children. With the passage of time and growing thirst for education, he advocated and managed to implement proportional reservation for the *dalit* students in schools and universities as well as other educational institutions in the country and in different streams of education at graduation and post-graduation levels too. Similarly, he also made successful efforts for reservation for scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes in the educational and training institutions of technical subjects and engineering. He arranged scholarships and special hostels for scheduled caste and scheduled tribe students.[47]

Before independence of India and several decades thereafter, Babu Jagjivan Ram gave ready proof of his efficiency and immense talent in the functioning of several ministries as a Cabinet Minister. While he strove to defend the rights of scheduled castes and the

scheduled tribes for preserving balance in the society, he also got official orders issued from time to time of proportional reservation for them, as regards direct recruitment to posts at several levels in government enterprises (central and state). He also focussed his attention on the due implementation of these orders. In 1969, after nationalisation of banks Babu Jagjivan Ram told the Indian Prime Minister, Smt. Indira Gandhi about the negligible representation of the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes, at different levels of positions in banks and government's financial institutions. It is due to his initiative that it become compulsory and constitutional to fill the posts earmarked for reservation at all levels in banks and government's financial bodies with candidates from these classes only.[48] Reservation played a key role in improving the socio-economic situation of the *dalit* class. Whatever little progress the oppressed communities could make had become possible due to the incorporation of the provision for reservation under the Constitution of India. Babu Jagjivan Ram laid the foundations of this principle of reservation for them as history would always remind us.

In his book *Caste Challenge in India*, attracting the attention of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, Babu Jagjivan Ram wrote, "...The special facilities and privileges should not be deemed as incentives for taking sides but be understood as rightful dues to be provided for years of deprivation."[49]

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A Congress Stalwart

INDIAN National Congress was born as a public movement in India to resist vested British interests as the Britishers had adopted the policy of divide and rule. In Indian society's multi-caste and multi-religion structure, they encouraged discrimination between people of different castes and religions. They divided people on the basis of regionalism and languages. Not only this, to weaken the economy of the country, they did not let the cottage and medium scale industries survive. During the British rule, instead of self-sufficiency, dependence became the order of the day.

For Indians, there were hardly any avenues of education in science and technical field and barely any opportunities for general education. Lack of education inhibits enlightenment. Illiteracy makes it possible to work a man inhumanely and not let him become aware of his rights. Therefore repression of Hindus and Muslims in large numbers, destruction of their industries, religion oriented conflicts between them, tussle on the basis of region and language, no fundamental education, apathy towards human rights etc. factors caused disarray in the social system of India during British rule and also resulted in disintegration in the society.

Under these circumstances, the enlightened lot in the country were seeking a way to get rid of the Britishers. On the sacred soil of India, Allan Octavian Hume came forward to unite the people. He knew the Indian social system well. He also completely understood the yearing for freedom among the people. The credit for the establishment of the Indian National Congrerss goes to him. The first session of the Indian National Congress was organised on 28 December 1885 at Bombay (now Mumbai). Social workers, teachers, religious leaders, lawyers, barristers, intellectuals, traders

and farmers from all over the country participated in it. There, all the representatives present unanimously decided that the Congress would have to be expanded for getting the Indians their due rights.

People were so impressed by the set objectives of Congress that this organisation soon emerged as quite a big public movement. The reason for expansion of this organisation was also that it was not established with the purpose of promoting people of a particular religion or caste. It was for the welfare of all Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Zoroastrians, Buddhists, Jains and people of different religions were included in it. The history of the freedom movement shows that though the tortures under the tyrannical rule of the Britishers endeavoured to subdue the spirit of the people, they refused to yield or submit and remained adamant, insisting on their demand for freedom no matter what their background.

At the beginning of this century, the country had fully become a British colony. The Britishers were busy transferring bounty to London. It appeared as if India was a pawn in only British capital investment plan. Since the advent of civilisation, India has been considered an agrarian economy. About eighty per cent of the population in the country has been dependent on agriculture. Therefore The Britishers made important changes in the agriculture based economy of India so as to benefit themselves and restrict the profit of the farmers. A main attraction of the change was to collect revenue through the medium of taxes on farm produce. They encouraged the *zamindari* system which led to the exploitation of the landless labour.

With the purpose of sabotaging the Congress, the Britishers succeeded in creating a split between the Hindus and the Muslims and in 1906, Muslim League was established. The public campaign for the freedom of the country weakened somewhat but soon people of all communities understood this British trick. In 1924 the Congress session was held at Belgaum under the presidentship of Mahatma Gandhi. As a result of the success of this session, an appeal for 'Hindu-Muslim Unity' was issued in the whole country.

At this session, proposals on eradication of untouchability and solution to the problems of the oppressed classes were also passed. Mahatma Gandhi's comprehensive views and his dedication towards the country courageously inspired the people to not only join Congress but also work according to proposals and plans.

While on one hand, under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi the untiring efforts to remove mutual differences and to bind people of the country together in the ties of unity gained momentum, on the other hand, the Britishers posed obstacles in the path of unification of the people. The rural folk in the country leading self-sufficient lives were made dependent on the money-lenders and land-owners. Dearth of money made them take loans from money-lenders at higher rates of interest and unable to pay it back within stipulated time, they ended up paying several times more than the principal. Consequently they grew dependent on the money-lenders and the land-owners, losing their own land or living as bonded labour. "The lowest form of landless labourers is seen among the 'Kamia' people in Bihar. These are the bonded labourers who are forced to perform quite menial tasks for their masters to pay off the increasing amount of interest on the loans taken."[1] In the same way, Ubala and Koli in Maharashtra, Cheruma, Holia, Ajwa and Pulaiyya people in Madras and Kerala actually became bonded labourers. In the then United Provinces, similar was the lot of Halwahe and Chamar.

In 1931, the Britishers conducted a census in India. According to this census, the number of the landless labourers in the country was approximately three crore and forty lakhs. At the time, Babu Jagjivan Ram was a student in Calcutta University. He had begun working for the oppressed classes from his student days only. The main objective in establishing social organisations as 'Ravidas Mahasabha' and Depressed Classes League was to make the crore of people from oppressed, backward and exploited classes, aware of human rights and bring them at par with other classes in the country. For fulfilment of this aim, Babu Jagjivan Ram became a crusader for social equality.

At the time, several unions of numerous employees in skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled categories working in the large mills and factories in the country were suffering under the British administration's cycle of oppression. They were undertaking strikes, demanding fixed minimum wages, fixed work-hours, lunch-break, paid vacations and reforms in work-conditions. At many places, the mill-owners resorted to lock-outs, expelling workers. In Calcutta, labourers conditions were deplorable. Babu Jagjivan Ram submited a memorandum on the issue of minimum wages to the government on their behalf while he also staged a non-violent '*dharna*' with the labourers. He involved the labourer's wives, teaching them about domestic hygiene and the importance of educating their children. He was also involved in setting up schools in many slums of Calcutta.[2]

As the president of the Depressed Classes League, he had become such a popular student in Calcutta that not only the oppressed classes but also the professors and the intellectuals in Calcutta University admired him. On Mahatma Gandhi's arrival at Calcutta, Babu Jagjivan Ram became so impressed by his speeches as to choose the path of non-violence for defending human values. Taking Mahatma Gandhi to be his political guru, after his education he returned to his native place Chandwa to seek his mother's blessings and took a vow for the uplift of the crores of the oppressed and backward class people in the country. Bihar province was his initial work-sphere yet his heart and mind was tuned towards the emancipation of numerous oppressed class people in all nooks and corners of India.

Congress vow of gaining freedom had bound the multitudes of the country in a common bond but Babu Jagjivan Ram was impressed for another reason. He was more attracted by the congress policy of uplift of the oppressed class people.

Vowing to eradicate untouchability, Mahatma Gandhi established the ‘Anti-Untouchability League’, on 30 September 1932. This historical step in the direction of eliminating untouchability aroused

the curiosity of the upper-caste people. Some people did not like this step of Mahatma Gandhi. However, Mahatma Gandhi had already drawn in his mind, a picture of the country's freedom. He was against all sentiments of discrimination. He had dreamt of an India with equal respect for all communities.

At the inauguration ceremony of the Bihar province branch of Anti-Untouchability League, Dr.Rajendra Prasad and other eminent personalities took part. In this session, young Babu Jagjivan Ram got the opportunity to express his views and he did so eloquently. He drew the attention of the crowd towards various aspects of the social and economic conditions of the people belonging to the oppressed classes. The meaningful issues on the basis of truth drew strong reactions. Some people found the bitter truth distasteful but most were pleased with his frankness. On this occasion, Dr. Rajendra Prasad asked him to work as the Secretary of the Anti-Untouchability League in the province of Bihar. Babu Jagjivan Ram gladly accepted the offer. This marked the beginning of national-level social work for him.

Meanwhile, after his release from prison in August 1933, Mahatma Gandhi resumed his campaign against untouchability. To awaken the sentiments of the Hindus, in May 1933 he undertook a 21 days fast. It had a dramatic effect. Lakhs of people praised this move. The reports of his efforts to bring about revolutionary changes in the society were published in the national and local newspapers and magazines. This provided a direction to the public 'but the social transformation that Mahatma Gandhi sought, could not come about. Whenever he called out to eliminate untouchability a huge crowd would gather to hear him. He was praised much in these meetings and the sky would resound with the slogans of "long live Mahatma Gandhi." However, the people dispersed from the venue unconvinced. The orthodox groups held meetings displaying black flags against his move for a social change."[3] Later, the name of the Anti-Untouchability League was changed to "Harijan Sevak Sangh."

Now Babu Jagjivan Ram was shouldered with the work of three organisations. These were – 'Ravidas Mahasabha' and Depressed

Classes League which he founded and the 'Harijan Sevak Sangh' (society of servants of oppressed classes) that Mahatma Gandhi had established. Through the medium of these organisations, he endeavoured to emancipate the oppressed classes and bring about a social awakening. He was in favour of revolutionary changes in the infrastructure of the country. He wrote, "I have always said that untouchability, with denial of opportunities and elements of slavery, permeates the social and economic fabric of the Hindu society. This is why I have come to believe that it can only be eradicated when the social and economic order is re-established. This points to a revolution–social, economic and political so big in all aspects as the world has not seen to date."[4]

Although the people of oppressed classes had been given representation according to the provisions mentioned in the Acts of 1909 and 1919 but this could not be of much help in bringing about social awareness among the oppressed classes to the extent as was expected. The main reason for this was the under representation of the oppressed classes, far less in proportion to their population. Still, this fixed representation generated respect for the system in the psyche of the oppressed classes. To defend the right to vote of the oppressed classes, the British administration, in 1932, announced the McDonald Communal Awards by which they gained representations through reserved constituencies. However, this was seen as yet another insiduous application by the British administration of the policy, to divide and rule the country. Reserved constituencies gave rise to the feeling of separatism among the Muslims. It also affected the Sikhs. In all respects, the opinion was being formulated that this was a British plan to divide the country into several factions.

From the Yerwada prison, on 11 March 1932, Mahatma Gandhi, wrote a letter to the Secretary of State for India Samuel Hore, expressing his apprehensions about the plot to divide the country. In the letter, he also mentioned that if the British government decided on reserved constituencies for the oppressed classes then he would undertake a fast unto death.[5]

On 13 April 1932, Samuel Hore replied to Mahatma Gandhi's letter, suggesting that he wait for the report of the Lovian Franchise Committee in this regard before deciding to undertake a fast.[6] According to the report of this Committee, the British government announced its decision. Opposing this declaration Mahatma Gandhi began his fast unto death at the Yerwada prison.

Sardar Patel and Mahadev Desai were also in the prison along with Mahatma Gandhi, whose fast-unto death moved the whole country. However, when the situation grew serious, the McDonald Communal Award was amended in accordance with Mahatma Gandhi's wishes and thus he ended his fast. This amended declaration later became famous as the 'Poona Pact'.

Babu Jagjivan Ram had already seen to it that the Depressed Classes League passed a proposal which he sent to Mahatma Gandhi before the Poona Pact was finalised. Although the League's functionaries had entrusted him with the responsibility of personally presenting this proposal before Mahatma Gandhi, his elder brother Sant Lal fell ill suddenly because of which he was unable to meet Mahatma Gandhi then. Some portions of this proposal are:

(1) The people of oppressed classes prefer living with the undivided public in India and oppose all type of separatism.

(2) After gaining Independence, oppressed classes shall have to be given due representation in all the state legislatures.

(3) Instead of separate constituencies there should be an arrangement that the oppressed classes should find full representation in municipality and the legislatures.

(4) The people of oppressed classes should be adequately represented in all the government services in the country.[7]

It was observed that Mahatma Gandhi gave serious consideration to the proposals from Depressed Classes League of Babu Jagjivan Ram who laid the foundation for the future of the crore of the oppressed class people in the country. This historic event improved the image of the oppressed classes.

The Government of India Act, 1935 was implemented by the British administration. In accordance with it, the province of Bihar was separated from Orissa. In Bihar Legislative Council a post fell vacant for a nominated member from the oppressed classes. To fill this post, young Babu Jagjivan Ram was considered as the best choice, on the basis of his contributions. Therefore the Bihar government nominated Babu Jagjivan Ram as a member of the Bihar Legislative Council. Its session began on 30 August 1936 in Ranchi and continued till 12 Setember 1936. In this way, for the first time, Babu Jagjivan Ram represented the oppressed classes in the Bihar Legislative Council.

Under the Government of India Act 1935 there was a provision for provincial elections. The electoral process began in December 1936 and the election campaign came to an end in the beginning of 1937. Clarifying its policy in regard to this election, Congress elaborated on its decision taken at the Faizpur session, "to reject the Government of India Act, 1935 which has been imposed on the Indian public against their wishes."

The congress believed that to extend support to the 1935 Act was to betray the freedom movement. The British government wanted to retain authority in its own hands. Therefore, it made utmost efforts to scuttle the so-called Faizpur resolution. Before the elections were held, Babu Jagjivan Ram agreed to contest elections from Depressed Classes League with Congress in the province of Bihar. He decided to field candidates in the elections in agreement with Congress on 14 seats of the Legislative Council in Bihar province. Taking these elections as a challenge, Babu Jagjivan Ram worked hard. The question here was not only of his own but also the success of all the candidates whom he had hand-picked. Ultimately, under his leadership, all the candidates were victorious. Babu Jagjivan Ram was declared elected unopposed.

In this way, for eleven legislative councils in the country, elections were held at 1,585 places. Congress was successful on 715 seats. Of the 482 seats reserved for the Muslims, 108 seats were won by Muslim League.[8]

In these elections, Congress won a majority in Bombay, Madras, the United provinces, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa. In the province of Bihar, Congress needed the cooperation of legislators of other parties to form a government.

Meanwhile, the farmers and the labourers had intensified their agitation. In the entire country began a never-ending series of anti-British strikes and demonstrations. Taking their cue from the labourers and farmer's agitation, the landless-labourers in India too decided to put forth their problems before the British administration. The credit for providing leadership to them, goes to Babu Jagjivan Ram. In 1937, he founded the Khetihar Mazdoor Sabha (Agricultural-Labourer's Organisation) in Bihar province.[9] For the fulfilment of the main objectives of this organisation, lakhs of labourers in Bihar held a vast demonstration in front of the Bihar Assembly. This rally was held to oppose the practice of forced-labour, under-payment, harassment and uncertain work-hours. Jagjivan Ram organised them and made them aware of their rights.

Meanwhile, Congress had to decide whether or not to constitute provincial governments. It had become necessary to consider the issue seriously since the British administration had bestowed such privileges upon the Governors in the provinces due to which they did not hesitate to pose obstacles in the administrative setup. To counter this situation, a proposal was passed in Congress Executive session that "Congress executive permits the constitution of cabinets in those provinces where the Congress has majority but this action will not be considered as valid until it becomes convinced that the governors will not exercise their right to interfere and reject the advice of a minister in the constitutional matters."[10]

This decision of the executive forced the British administration to curtail the administrative powers of the governor. Viceroy Lord Linlithgow issued a notice from Shimla that "the governors will not interfere in cabinet policies nor obstruct the daily administration in the provinces nor use unilaterally, their special privileges. The Governors will function in consultation with the ministers in all matters of cabinet jurisdiction including those of the minorities

and the position of the military. The cabinet's responsibility will be towards the state legislatures and not the British Parliament."[11] Considering this declaration as timely and a fair one, Mahatma Gandhi gave his permission to form a council of ministers in the provinces where Congress was in majority. Consequently, Congress formed governments in seven out of the eleven provinces.

It was quite another matter to form a cabinet in Bihar province. Babu Jagjivan Ram had the support of 14 legislators from the Oppressed Classes League, without whose assistance it was not possible for any political group to constitute a council of ministers. Mr. Mohammad Yunus decided to form a cabinet and sent Gurusahai Lal to Babu Jagjivan Ram for seeking support of his 14 legislators. He offered a ministerial berth and several facilities to Babu Jagjivan Ram but he was not to be swayed. He conveyed to Dr. Rajendra Prasad, in detail all that had transpired with regard to the temptations offered by Mr. Yunus with British backing. In his letter to Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Rajendra Prasad mentioned in detail, Babu Jagjivan Ram's exceptional sincerity and political maturity. Some excerpts from this letter follow. "Who are not swayed by position and temptations – I still remember Lowell's lines, read long time back, which have been refreshed in my memory by the firm determination of the Harijan legislators in Bihar to not join the cabinet–

In such circumstances
if only God would produce such persons
who would favour mutual fraternising,
honest thinking and a mighty heart,
such persons as would not be swayed,
by the greed of power,
such persons as cannot be bought,
by the temptations of position,
such persons as possess discretion
and a strong will power,
such persons as are true and honest.

"Meanwhile Jagjivan Ram was away on a visit to a distant village in Shahabad to check the conditions of the *harijan* affected

by a fire-incident there. Yunus sent a telegram to seek information about him and when Babu Jagjivan Ram returned from Patna, he was directly invited to the residence of Yunus. He stayed there till midnight. During this time, he was constantly pressurised, persuaded and subjected to temptations but remained adamant on his stand not to accept a position. He met me the next morning to relate the occurrences of the previous night. During our conversation, a Muslim friend came to seek private audience with me. I asked Shri. Jagjivan Ram to wait for a while in the adjacent room. Beside other things, that Muslim friend told me that our *Harijan* friends are being subjected to offers since their leader was with Yunus the night before. I told him that I knew the full story and my friend in the adjoining room was the one with Yunus till midnight yesterday but has refused his offer of a ministerial post. At approximately 11 a.m. Jagjivan Ram went back home. Yunus was to present the list of the names of his ministers at 4 p.m. in the evening. At about 3 p.m., his colleague again met Babu Jagjivan Ram and stayed with him till a few minutes before 4 p.m. He offered Babu Jagjivan Ram a ministerial berth (from which, in the next six months, the time period that the cabinet was expected to last, he would receive Rs 25000) and applied pressure tacties but he could not buy him over. When he left, Babu Jagjivan Ram came to me at Sadakat Ashram and related these last-ditch efforts. He was the first person who gave information about the names included in the list of ministers to be presented by Yunus to the governor. He also said that Yunus would announce these names today evening only. With the purpose of attracting Bapu's attention, I have discussed at length, the great sacrifice by our so-branded untouchable brother. I had told Jagjivan Ram that merely by this one incident, not only he but his whole community's stature has been raised, in the eyes of the people and still, there are some who scorn. I know of several such so-called high caste Hindus and Muslims who would have immediately accepted such an offer and they would not have hesitated to accept the temptation even of Rs. 4000/- a month. This person from an oppressed class has shown how high ideals can be maintained even while living in

poverty, morale can be kept high and self-respect preserved despite insults and high-handedness. Would the high-caste Hindus imbibe some lessons from the conduct of this great son of India?"[12]

After this letter was published in the magazine *Harijan*, senior leaders, social workers and intellectuals, from all over the country praised Babu Jagjivan Ram. Mahatma Gandhi even described him as having emerged as the purest gold out of fire.[13]

Thanks to Babu Jagjivan Ram's deep wisdom, great merit and unshakeable sincerity, in Bihar a Congress cabinet was formed instead of a puppet cabinet. Srikrishna Sinha headed this cabinet. With all his victorious collagues, Babu Jagjivan Ram accepted the membership of Congress. Thus began Babu Jagjivan Ram's journey in Congress with his sincere devotion, sacrifices, sentiment of fraternity, yearning to connect people to the collective non-violent agitation for the freedom of the country and commitment to the integrity of the country. On 10 July 1937, a political session of Congress was organised at Gopalganj in Bihar attended by Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Dr. Srikrishna Sinha, Shri Anugraha Narayan Sinha and Babu Jagjivan Ram. The main objective of this meeting was to consider the elimination of untouchability and work for the progress of *harijans*. Welcoming the convention at this meeting, Babu Jagjivan Ram put forth his suggestions for improving the lot of landless-labourers. He also spoke about encouraging the small and cottage industries. He made recommendations about the suitable arrangements for the education of children from the oppressed classes, setting up schools in the villages, appointment of teachers and financial assistance to the poor children. He advised that administration's assistance be sought for ameliorating untouchability. His suggestions deeply impressed the congressmen present.

On 01 August 1937 Babu Jagjivan Ram was appointed the secretary, Bihar Legislative Council. Here it would be pertinent to mention that Babu Jagjivan Ram's political stature had grown so high that he should have become a cabinet minister and so

everybody thought. However Shri Jagan Lal Chaudhry wrote a letter to Dr. Rajendra Prasad staking his claim to a ministerial post. He was older than Babu Jagjivan Ram, who withdrew from the scene observing that the former had the advantage of both, experience and age. Shri Jagan Lal Chaudhry could become a minister due to Babu Jagjivan Ram's sacrifice. Babu Jagjivan Ram’s move was certainly a praiseworthy step to strengthen Congress organisation and it was lauded by Dr. Rajendra Prasad and other senior Congress leaders. In February 1938, a Congress session was due at Haripura. Babu Jagjivan Ram was also invited there. This session was presided over by Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. It considered the possible future plans and programs to attain independence and preserve the integrity of the country. This was the 51st session of Congress.

After Congress session was over, according to a pre-arranged program, Babu Jagjivan Ram organised a session of the ‘Khetihar Mazdoor Sabha’ in which, he requested Mahatma Gandhi to inaugurate. However, due to Mahatma Gandhi's busy schedule, Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel inaugrated this session. The main objective of organising the session of Khetihar Mazdoor Sabha in Gujarat province was to make the landless-labourers from this province aware of their rights and unite them so that better organised, they may be successful in preventing the atrocities by the land-owners and securing suitable wages.

Meanwhile, the Kissan Sabha also grew strong. During the fourth and fifth conventions of the Kissan Sabha several decisions were taken. One of these was, “the time has now come when the combined powers of the country – Congress, the public farmers, labourers and organisations – should come forward together to attack the slave constitution of imperialistic hegemony, gain complete national independence and establish the democratic state of Indian public so that ultimately a farmer - labourer state can be founded. The farmers of India, with biggest stakes in peace, shall, along with the labour in the country, act as *haraval* squads,

challenge the authority of the foreign government and oppose the export of the country's resources. Along with the agitation against the British government, campaigns would also be launched against India's kings, emperors, land-owners and the money-lenders as they are the support-pillars of the government."[14] Kissan Sabha's decision brought its firm determination to the notice of the people. Thus we see that all sections of the society were intensively involved in the freedom movement.

The situation was changing fast. In March 1939 a Congress session took place at Tripuri. There, Subhas Chandra Bose secured re-election as the Congress President, there were some differences of opinion between Mahatma Gandhi and Subhas Chandra Bose. Therefore Mahatma Gandhi did not take kindly to Subhas Chandra Bose continuing as the Congress President. Subhas Chandra Bose then tendered his resignation from the post of President of Congress and set up a party known as Forward Bloc. Meanwhile in 1939, the international situation grew grim with Germany launching a war. After occupying the Denzing port in Poland on 15 September 1939, Germany vanquished Warsaw, the capital of Poland. At the time, Russia also attacked Poland from the east. Conquering Poland, Germany and Russia divided it between themselves. The war took place because of imperialistic interests. On one hand, the allied-nations, England, America and France, to defend their commercial and industrial interests were bringing several countries of the world under colonial rule. On the other hand, when Germany, Italy and Japan, for their growing population and industrial progress, sought to establish colonies England, America and France began opposing them. They could not tolerate that these countries set up their settlements in Asia and Africa, coming to pose a perpetual danger to their own economic prosperity. Thus the second world war took place due to conflict in mutual interests of these two sides. Russia occupied Finland, Latvia of Baltic Ocean, Estonia and Lithunia. Germany occupied Norway and Denmark. It attacked France from three sides and occupied Paris then occupying Greece, Yugoslavia and Crete, it came to dominate the east. The international situation worsened and in such an atmosphere where the whole world was threatened by war, the Congress had to explain its

policy with regard to the freedom movement. It remarked in a statement that "Congress totally distances itself from the conduct of the fascist countries in destroying democratic countries and declares that eliminating tyranny and imperialism is essential for peace and progress in the world."[15]

For its selfish motives, Britain dragged India into this war without consulting the political bodies in India. This move of the British government was severely criticised in the entire country. Congress, in full steam, criticised harshly the policies of Viceroy and non-violent demonstrations against the cycle of oppression were organised in all corners of the country. In protest, Congress boycotted several sessions of the Central Legislative Council. While on one hand, all Indians had gathered under Congress flag to agitate against the plot of Viceroy to drag the country into the second world war, on the other hand, the representatives of Muslim League grew more vocal in their demand for a separate country, Pakistan. Taking advantage of the situation, Viceroy, using his special privileges, passed the Government of India (amendment) Act and India Defence Act that allowed him the power to suppress democratic rights. Now Viceroy could even use his special prerogatives through the medium of Governors to adjourn or dismiss the legislatures in the provinces.

In such a situation some senior Congress leaders drew the attention of the representatives of Muslim League towards Viceroy's plot to suppress the freedom movement. Congress immediately demanded from the British government the acceptance of India's right of self decision and the formation of a government at Centre, responsible to the Union Legislature. The government assured Congress of considering its demands. However, when the new and amended laws were implemented, its false promises were exposed. Congress immediately passed a resolution whereby its governments, constituted in eight provinces tendered resignations.

The people in the country had full faith in Congress. Now they were waiting for Mahatma Gandhi's orders on full independence for the country. Meanwhile in March 1940, Muslim League passed

a resolution at Lahore to form Pakistan. The communist activists were also striving for the freedom of the country, in their own way. Indian Communist Party's Bengal province branch committee's letter, 'Red Flag' mentioned that "we want independence so that the hopes and aspirations of the exploited public and oppressed people can be actualised. This country will not get freedom as alms from the British government. The communists believe that freedom will be gained not by compromises but by destroying the British government."[16]

The communists wanted to get freedom for the country by following the revolutionary path. The politburo of Indian communist Party exhorted the people to "launch a people's war and campaigns with a free will and in an independent manner... propose co-ordination in working with all fascism–opposing countries."[17] Through his social and political actions, Babu Jagjivan Ram had built a reputation for himself by now. In the beginning of 1940, he was elected as a member of the All India Congress Committee. Some days later, a session of Bihar Congress Committee took place (in the last week of February 1940 and the first week of March 1940) at which elections for the executive-secretary of Bihar Provincial Congress Committee were also held. Babu Jagjivan Ram won this seat.

At the time the onus of organising training camps of Congress was on the important functionaries of youth Congress. In Bihar province, arrangements for providing training to the activists of youth Congress were entrusted to Babu Jagjivan Ram who sincerely accomplished this. According to the program set by Congress, he organised people at several places in Bihar province and directed them to face all situations. While on one hand, he contributed in strengthening the Congress on the other hand, through the medium of Depressed Classes League he inspired the people of oppressed classes to work for the Congress without a hidden agenda, connecting them to this biggest organisation in the country. In those days, he also addressed many meetings of the lakhs of students attending schools in Bihar. He undertook an extensive

and strong propaganda campaign, propagating love of one's country, fraternal sentiments, unity, integrity, awareness of human values and secularism as the basic elements of the freedom movement. As the executive secretary of the Bihar province Congress Committee Babu Jagjivan Ram was given the responsibility by the All India Congress Committee, to set-up a Congress camp office in Ramgarh in preparation for the full session of Congress. Gaining Mahatma Gandhi's confidence, Babu Jagjivan Ram enthusiastically discharged this responsibility. This session was organised from 10 to 20 March 1940 and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad presided over it. At this important session, the next move for attainment of independence was to be decided upon. Clarifying its stand, Congress stated, "it is clear from the recent declarations made by the British government, in the context of India that Great Britain is fighting basically for the achievement of imperialistic objectives. Under the circumstances, it is clear that Congress will not be involved, directly or indirectly, in the war."[18]

On the other hand, it was seen that some ministers of the Viceroy's executive council under the Union legislature were not loath to misguide the people, malign the Congress proposals and criticise it. Zafarullah Khan, the then Law Minister, said, "Each one of us here, feels for the world-crisis and we are firmly with our king and the country, with courage and allegiance,"[19] committed to action. Those supporting the British government by inclusion in the authority-structure or from outside, made constant efforts to perpetuate the British rule in the country. From all corners of the country, Congress activists branded Zafarullah's statement as regrettable. At a meeting in Buxar, Babu Jagjivan Ram termed this idea as 'shameful'.[20]

Addressing a general meeting at Allahabad, Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru said, "We are not out to bargain with the Britishers nor do we seek to benefit by their difficulties. In our view, from the perspective of both India and the world, it is essential that they should clarify all their objectives and reassure people with regard to their genuineness and sincerity."[21]

At a huge rally in Patna, Babu Jagjivan Ram spoke thus, “If, the colonies under the imperialists and the vested interests and privileges are to be defined by war then India cannot have anything to do with it. If the Britishers are battling in favour of democracy then they should essentially put an end to colonial subjugation. Therefore, they have to establish a total democracy in India and the Indians should get the right to form their own constitution through the medium of a constituent assembly without any external or internal interference.”[22]

As per Mahatma Gandhi’s words, “Jagjivan Ram has emerged as the purest gold out of fire.” Babu Jagjivan Ram in his political life, undertook several measures for the freedom of the country and toured the country extensively and strenously.

Addressing a huge crowd at Banaras, against the British government and Great Britain’s policies, he stated, “In the perspective of this war, only a free and equal India can extend cooperation. Until this huge change is brought about, no leader in the country has the ability to inspire people for a battle that is not ours... Therefore, the first step should be the declaration of freedom for India.”[23] To propagate Mahatma Gandhi's ideas on the preservation of the country's culture and civilisation, he exhorted the people to stay united in the freedom movement. He said, “let the British government know that India is not satisfied with their slow paced promises. It wants the right to independence in full and to prepare its own constitution.”[24]

In August 1940, a session of the All India Congress Committee was held at Patna in which Babu Jagjivan Ram and thousands of Congress activists and members participated, representing the different parts of the country. In this meeting, Mahatma Gandhi expressed his desire to meet the Viceroy. He wanted the British government to concede the Congress demand of self-rule. According to his wish, efforts were made in this regard but the Viceroy declined to meet him. This aroused public ire but the people exercised restraint to follow the path of non-violence that their leader had shown.

In September 1940, another important meeting of the All India Congress Committee was organised at Bombay. It was presided over by Mahatma Gandhi who once again led the Congress with full force. He decided to begin a campaign of individual *satyagraha* for the dignity of the nation and against the unfair policies of the British administration. Mahatma Gandhi exhorted for this *satyagraha* to be restrictive, disciplined and symbolic. Accordingly, Mahatma Gandhi's disciple, Vinoba Bhave, first of all, sought his permission for the same and then courted arrest as a *satyagraha* activist at Pavnar Ashram, on 17 October 1940. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru also courted arrest the same day, as a *satyagraha* activist. It caused a furore in the country.

On 10 December 1940, in the Shahabad district of Bihar, Babu Jagjivan Ram held meetings along a 40 mile long route telling the people, to disobey the diktat of the British government to include the country in the second world war and obey Mahatma Gandhi's instructions. The same day, he was arrested at Piru, from where he was shifted to Arrah. He was put on trial and sentenced to one year's imprisonment. On 11 December 1940, he was sent to the Central Jail, Hazaribagh. Jai Prakash Narayan, S.K.Sinha, A.N. Sinha, Prakash Narayan, K.B. Sahai and B.N. Jha were also with him at this prison[25]. Here, he undertook comprehensive and in–depth study of Karl Marx's 'Das Kapital' and other books on economics, social treatises, political science, history, religious literature and Hindi as well as English literature. He was released on 10 September 1941. He returned to Chandwa and involved himself again in Congress work.

Babu Jagjivan Ram went to Banaras to enquire the well-being of Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya who was seriously ill then. At the time, Mahatma Gandhi was at Vardha and sent a special messenger from there to ask Babu Jagjivan Ram to meet him immediately at Vardha. Babu Jagjivan Ram reached Sevagram Ashram at Vardha to meet Mahatma Gandhi. Dr. Rajendra Prasad was staying nearby, in Bajawadi. After a few days' stay at Sevagram Ashram, Babu Jagjivan Ram joined Dr. Prasad at Bajawadi.

Mahatma Gandhi wanted to bring about a transformation in the society according to his line of thinking. He had outlined in his mind, several plans for the welfare of the public reeling under the practice of untouchability prevalent in the country. He had also formulated plans for the social and economic progress of the crore of oppressed people in India. He was committed to the schemes for the educational development of oppressed and the backward classes. While on one hand, Mahatma Gandhi was guiding the non-violent struggle for the freedom of the country, on the other hand, he had also taken a firm decision for the educational, social and economic uplift of the crores of oppressed people in the society.

How to bring about social, economic and educational emancipation of the people from oppressed classes? This was the main question before Mahatma Gandhi. While Gandhi cherished in his heart a fervent desire to uplift the oppressed-classes Babu Jagjivan Ram gave much thought to the issue of the all-round development of these people suffering from centuries. Although sometimes doubts would prevail in his mind with regard to this, he had drawn a picture of the multi-faceted development of oppressed classes in his mind. During his fortnight-long stay at Vardha, daily, in the evening, discussions would be held with Mahatma Gandhi, on questions of the liberation of the oppressed classes. Policies would be framed on several aspects regarding the progress of the oppressed classes. Dr. Rajendra Prasad was also involved in these discussions and deliberations.

Congress body was committed to the implementation of its national policies and plans. It also sought the progress of the oppressed classes. In the Congress proposals, there was mention of bringing the *dalit* into the mainstream in the Independent India. According to these proposals, Congress based its future plans on several invaluable suggestions of Babu Jagjivan Ram. Returning from Vardha to Patna, Babu Jagjivan Ram again busied himself with Congress work. He undertook several creative jobs, along

with Prof. Abdul Bari and Binodanand Jha deemed as wise social workers. Such social work made Babu Jagjivan Ram a dear leader of people of all castes, religions and sects beside the oppressed classes.

The eighth session of All India Dalit Varg Sangh was organised in Meerut from February 01 to 03 1942 and Babu Jagjivan Ram presided over it. This session was of particular significance since it was to discuss the role of the people from oppressed classes in the perspective of the conditions in the country. Under Babu Jagjivan Ram's presidentship, it was decided that the whole community of the oppressed classes people would once again support Congress in the fight for the freedom of the country even if it comes to sacrificing their lives, they will not back out.

At this session, resolutions were passed in regard to several issues connected with the all-round development of the people from the oppressed classes. Babu Jagjivan Ram had discussed this with Mahatma Gandhi at Vardha. It was also decided to give full information on the matter to Mahatma Gandhi.[26] After the Meerut session, Babu Jagjivan Ram came to Delhi. Addressing many activists of the All India Harijan Sevak Sangh, he called out for accepting the responsibility towards the freedom movement in the country. Due to Babu Jagjivan Ram's influence, the oppressed classes enthusiastically took part in the freedom movement.

That was the era of momentous changes in the world. On 08 March 1940 Japan had occupied Rangoon. This made the British Prime Minister Sir Winston Churchill anxious. He decided to send Sir Stafford Cripps to India for a compromise on the demands by Indian leaders in their fight for freedom. On 22 March 1942 Cripps reached India with a delegation. In history, this delegation is also known as the 'Cripps Mission'. Discussions with the Congress and other representative organisations on the demands with regard to the freedom of the country remained inconclusive and Cripps had to return to London on 12 April 1942. About Cripps Mission, Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru wrote, "Even in granting

the principle of self-decision such restrictions and limitations were attached as to render our future dark."[27]

The Congress executive session took place at Vardha, from July 05 to 16, 1942. The proposal stated that "the British do not want to loosen their grip on India in any way and the national demands of Congress are also not acceptable to them. There has been a quick rise in the feelings of hatred against Britain and satisfaction over the success of the Japanese army. The executive is worried at this. If this is not prevented, it could only result in accepting Japan's invasion."[28] In this session, Mahatma Gandhi emphasised, "Now, the time has come when breaking the several years old chain of slavery, Congress should demand strongly, 'Britishers, quit India."[29]

The historical session of All India Congress Committee took place in Bombay on August 07 and 08, 1942. Babu Jagjivan Ram came from Patna to Bombay. He stayed at Hotel Windsor with Prof. Abdul Bari, a senior Congress leader from Bihar. Thousands attended this session where, in its proposal, Congress stated, "the All India Congress Committee, for defending India's right to freedom has decided to begin a non-violent public movement on a large scale and on every possible basis so that the country can put to use, the entire non-violent power that it has conserved during the last twenty-three years of peaceful struggle. The movement will be undertaken under Mahatma Gandhi's leadership. This Committee requests him to assume leadership and take such steps as he considers suitable in this regard, to lead the nation."[30]

Mahatma Gandhi was already giving directions for the freedom movement in the country. However, when the above decision by Congress put this onus on him in the form of a resolution, he came forward to shoulder the burden. Accepting in his heart, the collective voice of the country, on 07 August, at midnight, he exhorted, "I undertake the responsibility for leading you, not as a commander or patron but as your humble servant.. After all, what crime has the Congress committed in demanding freedom for India? Is such a claim a mistake? Is it justified to doubt Congress?..... If all the nations in the world oppose me, if the whole of India seeks to

persuade me otherwise, then too, I shall not budge from the set path. I shall advance on this path not only for India but for the whole world."[31] This resolution was passed on 08 August 1942. Mahatma Gandhi expressed his desire for a meeting with the Viceroy but it was not to be and on 09 August 1942, he was arrested. The same day, other Congress leaders viz. Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, Sarojini Naidu, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel and Asif Ali were arrested. These arrests aroused public ire in the country. Consequently, at several places, telephone and electricity wires were cut off, railway stations were damaged and rail tracks were uprooted. Many police stations were attacked and set on fire. The government adopted heavy repressive measures in which many were killed and injured. People were tear-gassed and assaulted brutally. A large number were arrested.

After the Congress session at Bombay was over Babu Jagjivan Ram and his associates returned to Patna via Allahabad by Calcutta Mail. The British secret police followed them. In this regard, Kamlapati Tripathi wrote, "In the 1942 campaign, Jagjivan Babu and I returned from Bombay on 09 August. I remember that the people of the secret service department were following us. They caught me but Jagjivan Babu reached his province and there he led an intensive campaign for ten-eleven days."[32]

Having escaped the secret police, Babu Jagjivan Ram reached Patna where he spread the message of the 'August Revolution'. He exhorted the youth to make this movement a success. Day and night, he addressed people about the basic concept of this campaign, inspiring them that now is the time when people of all the provinces have to make this movement successful by a non-violent struggle for the freedom of the country even if it costs them, their lives. On 11 August 1942, there was a large anti-British-Rule demonstration before Patna secretariat by students. The protesting students were lathi-charged. Several were hurt and many were severely injured.

On 20 August 1942, Babu Jagjivan Ram was arrested in Patna. After arrest along with he was kept for a few days at Bankipur

prison in Patna where Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Anugraha Narayan Sinha, Mahamaya Prasad Sinha and other leaders. In September 1942 Babu Jagjivan Ram was sent to the Hazaribgh Central Jail where he stayed for about 14 months. During imprisonment Babu Jagjivan Ram had to bear many hardships. According to Kamlapati Tripathi, "Jagjivan Babu's life has been one of sacrifices and ascetism. During the course of freedom movement, he has suffered severe hardships in prison too."[33] In the freedom movement, arrests continued and the British atrocities upon the people increased.

When Babu Jagjivan Ram was at the Hazaribagh Central Jail, at the Amritsar session of the All India Dalit Varg Sangh he was again chosen its president in – absentia. As per his guidance and instructions, lakhs of oppressed classes background held secret meetings at various places, throughout the country and held demonstrations against the British government. Lakhs of people in All India Dalit Varg Sangh were also the members and activists of Congress. League's power strengthened the Congress organisation.

Babu Jagjivan Ram's health deteriorated in prison. When he did not recover despite treatment, he was released on 10 October 1943. His Patna stay at home also did not aid his recovery and for climate-change he went to Shimla in June 1944. He stayed there till september 1944. He returned to Patna when his health-condition improved somewhat. He participated in various Congress programs particularly in Madhya Pradesh and Bombay states. He kept up his efforts for the freedom-movement in the country. On 06 May 1944, Mahatma Gandhi was also released. In June 1945 the Viceroy in India ordered release of all Congress and other leaders. Although the British Government tried its utmost to crush this movement yet the 1942, 'Quit India Movement' was the biggest organised campaign after the 1857 revolution to throw off the British rule and each section of the society participated actively in it."[34]

The Britishers had come to understand well that they would have to quit India. The Viceroy announced on the radio the intention of the government to grant full autonomy to India and provide for

self-rule. On 25 June 1945, the viceroy convened a conference at Shimla in which participated, "presidents of Congress and Muslim League; the representatives of oppressed classes and Sikhs; Congress and Muslim leaders in state legislatures; Congress and Muslim League leaders in the Union cabinet; leaders of Socialist party and European group in the legislature and the chief-ministers of the governments in provinces."[35] Lord Wavell was the Viceroy at the time. He proposed an executive council of 14 members. Under this proposal Congress and the Muslims League had to suggest five names each and the remaining four were to be nominated by the Viceroy. Discussions were on to implement this proposal but Jinnah insisted that all Muslim representatives must be nominated by the League only. The debate continued but ultimately this conference ended without any fruitful result.

However, in this conference, the representatives from the institutions representing the oppressed classes people were not invited. All India Dalit Varg Sangh (Oppressed Classes League) bitterly criticised this discriminatory behaviour. On 28 June 1945, a session of this League was held at Delhi under the presidentship of Jagjivan Ram. A memorandum was prepared for submission to the Viceroy wherein it was requested that in view of the population of the oppressed classes and for strengthening their political, social and economic conditions, it is essential that where discussions are held on the broader issue of providing freedom to and self-rule for the country, it is necessary that at least one representative be invited from All India Dalit Varg Sangh, Scheduled Castes Federation and the Depressed Classes Association, each."[36] According to an agreement at a session of the All India Dalit Varg Sangh between the Congress and the League, all the activists signed on the declaration and they thus became automatically, Congress members as well. British Prime Minister, Atlee, made an announcement about sending the 'Cabinet Mission' for granting self rule to India. This mission reached Delhi on 24 March 1946. Its members were Lord Patrick Lawrence, Sir Stafford Cripps and A.B. Alexander. The objectives of this mission were to set up a constituent assembly, constitute an executive council that is supported by all parties in India and to decide upon the ways to

draft a constitution. The Cabinet Mission separately invited the leaders of all the parties and listened to their ideas. Babu Jagjivan Ram was invited through a telegram on 05 April 1946 by the Cabinet Mission. As a representative of the oppressed classes, he appeared before the Mission on 08 April 1946. For the uplift of oppressed classes he submitted a memorandum which included many suggestions about providing special facilities in government services to the educated people of this background. This step later proved to be a historical one for the multi-faceted progress of the people from oppressed classes.

Muslim League only favoured the formation of Pakistan not wanting to remain in an undivided India. It presented its views before the Cabinet Mission. On 27 July 1946, in its meeting organised at Bombay, through a resolution, Muslim League rejected the Cabinet Mission. Congress accepted the proposals of the Cabinet Mission for a long-term plan and the formation of an interim government. Consequently, the Viceroy decided to constitute an interim cabinet after discussion with the members of the Cabinet Mission. On 16 June 1946 the names of 14 persons were announced who were to shoulder the responsibility of working in the interim government. These individuals were: Sardar Baldev Singh, Sir N.P. Engineer, Jagjivan Ram, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, H.K. Mehtab, John Mathai, Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, Khwaja Sir Nizamuddin, C. Rajgopalachari, Nawab Mohammad Ismail Khan, Nawab Liaquat Ali Khan and Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel.

Congress rejected the Viceroy's decision to constitute an interim cabinet since his list did not contain the name of any nationalist muslim. With regard to the constitution of an interim government, Babu Jagjivan Ram also contacted the Viceroy on 16 August 1946 saying that he did not want to be included in this interim government because no nationalist muslim had been included in this government.

Meanwhile, Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru and Mohammad Ali Jinnah held several talks. Pandit Nehru's endeavour was that Jinnah should not insist on Pakistan and collaborate in setting up a

government in an undivided India. However, Jinnah remained adamant on his demand and refused to join the interim government in united India. On 21 August 1946, Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru sent to the Viceroy a list of the names of people for constituting an interim cabinet. Ultimately, on 25 August 1946, the Viceroy again announced the names of 12 persons for constituting the national interim government. In this list too, the name of Babu Jagjivan Ram was there. On 02 September 1946, he took oath as the first Labour Minister in the interim national cabinet of the country.

In a letter on 03 September 1946, he described to his wife, the scene before oath-taking, "... Since morning, thinking of the responsibility and such a great task, I directed my attention towards God. I was constantly remembering God, my mother and the feet of my Guru. So many times, my eyes filled up with tears of joy, of gratitude.... Shri Birla had made preparations for a religious ceremony. At half- past nine O' clock, in a decorated hall sat Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel, Rajendra Babu and few other persons. The statue of the flute-wielder (Lord Krishna) was on the seat in front. Devotional songs began. *Raghupati Raghav Raja Ram* – was sung in a chorus. *Aarti* was done. At that time, I don't know how many times I cried thinking, oh God! strange are your ways. I did not even repose my faith in you. Still, you have raised me high.... After the ceremony was over, Birla's *bhabhi* (sister-in-law) put the vermillion-mark on the foreheads of the three of us, fed us jaggery and put garlands around our necks. From there we went to meet Mahatma Gandhi. The minister's residence was illuminated. The crowds milled around the path. Outside the door, Princess Amrit Kaur put cotton-threads around the neck, saying '– brother Jagjivanji, Bapu spun this cotton with his own hands and has given this'. The *Aarti* ceremony was conducted and vermillion marks put on forehead. It was Mahatma Gandhi's silence day. We touched his feet and sat. The devotional song began *'Vaishnav Jan toh tene Kahiye, je peer parayi Jaane re'....* I kept thinking – God! give me strength... that I can know the sufferings of others and make efforts for removing it... On a

small piece of paper, Mahatma Gandhi wrote for us.... "I have been thinking of you all since the time of prayer. Repeal the salt-tax, remove untouchability, unite Hindu-Muslims, adopt Khadi."[37] Adopting this order of Mahatma Gandhi as the basic aim of his life, Babu Jagjivan Ram decided firmly to implement with courage and determination, the future programs of the country.

The biggest question before the country was as to how should the constitution of the country be and till when should it be completed? In July 1946, from all over the country people were chosen for the constituent assembly. In these elections too, Babu Jagjivan Ram was elected unopposed.... This can be considered as further proof of his commitment towards the society and the public regard for him.

The first session of the Constituent Assembly began on 09 December 1946 at the Legislative Assembly (at present, the Parliament Building). 208 members attended this session. Dr. Sacchidananda Sinha presided over the Assembly. For the purpose of framing the constitution, he highlighted the background of the constitution of some countries. On 11 December 1946, Dr. Rajendra Prasad was elected as the permanent chairman of the Constituent Assembly.

On 13 December 1946, speaking about the objectives of framing the constitution, Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru said, ".... We have gathered here on this wonderful occasion in Indian history. In this transition period, I feel some amazement. It is possible that it is a cloudy day but after all, it is still a day. The clouds will part and light will definitely shine through."[38]

From December 13 to 19 1946 for five days, the Constituent Assembly continously debated on the preamble. After approving the preamble, the constituent Assembly set up many committees to broadly discuss the several aspects concerned with the formulation of the Constitution of India and mention the decisions taken on them, for collective interest. Main among these committees were-Union constitution Committee, Provincial Constitutional Committee, Union Power Committee, Advisory Committee (as

concerned with the fundamental rights, and minorities and Draft Committee.

Mahatma Gandhi believed that untill the social, economic and educational progress of the crore of oppressed classes people in the country takes place, the country cannot be considered as a developed one. He provided guidance to the Constituent Assembly about the form of the constitution to direct the country after independence. He had already discussed this with Babu Jagjivan Ram at Vardha. Babu Jagjivan Ram was appointed to the main committees of the Constituent Assembly due to his being a prominent leader of the oppressed classes people.

Playing an important role in preparing a constitution for the country, Babu Jagjivan Ram contributed in particular, in the direction of addressing the people of lower classes by the terms, scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes. He proved his maturity and foresight in eliminating untouchability from the constitutional perspective. Each citizen has the birth-right that under the same human circumstances, he should be similarly evaluated and enjoy unrestricted freedom in the activities concerned with equal opportunities viz, education, medical treatment, trade, industry, commerce and entry into places of religious worship. Therefore, believing in human rights as fundamental, Babu Jagjivan Ram discussed the drafts under the third section of the constitution and in view of their comprehensiveness, he laid emphasis on the need to consider the principle of equality as the basis. He presented before the Constituent Assembly his idea of binding the communities divided into castes in the country by the sentiment of fraternity into one national mainstream.

Babu Jagjivan Ram saw to it that for the uplift of the oppressed classes people, the special privileges of political sphere and reservation in government services are mentioned in the constitution. Not only this, later he got government orders issued with regard to the implementation of the reservation policy for positions in several categories of the government services not only in entry at the recruitment level but also in the oppurtunities for promotion, where the oppressed classes are concerned.

In the Constituent Assembly, for several days the debate continued, on the proposed sections, with regard to reservation. Many of the Congress members wanted that there should not be reservation at any level, in the political and government services for people of any class while Babu Jagjivan Ram and his followers openly advocated reservation. Only after a lengthy debate on the clauses proposing reservation, were many of them included finally by the constitution draft committee. Had it not been for Mahatma Gandhi's force, Pandit Nehru's will power and Babu Jagjivan Ram's determination then several clauses concerned with reservation in elected bodies and government services would not have been incorporated in the Constitution of the country.

Due to the mention of the provisions for reservation in the Constitution, the oppressed classes found a ray of hope that showed a path to this community suffering for centuries and also fostered in their mind, faith in the process of development. It generated awareness among them and made them capable of discerning among the political parties for suitable use of their franchise.

It was decided to hold the 67^{th} session of the All India Congress Committee at Patna, Babu Jagjivan Ram was chosen on 09 April 1962 as the President of the reception committee for this session. He strove to make the session a success. His untiring efforts made it possible to propagate widely among the masses the programs of the session.

In August 1963, several senior Congress leaders felt that the organisation had weakened and its main reason was the laxity of leaders and their growing distance from the common man. Congress President K. Kamraj believed that to strengthen Congress again, it had become necessary that senior Congress leaders quit the government positions and seek better communication with the public. This would foster mutual goodwill and amity among people and also polish the structure of Congress body. “Mahatma Gandhi had told a public functionary that one’s personal and public character should be the same. Actions and statements should be in tandem. He believed that there should be no difference between the external and inner forms. Life, whether personal or public, should be based

on moral values. To symbolise the form of this concept, he advocated truth and non-violence. He felt that the scope of service is more potent. If someone is in administration, his purpose should be to serve the public and someone not a part of administration, should also aim to serve the public only."[39]

To give a fresh lease of life to the code of conduct in Congress and reaffirm its culture, the then Prime Minister Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru accepted the 'Kamraj Plan'. For the implementation of this plan, senior minister (then Transport and Communications minister) Babu Jagjivan Ram resigned from the Union council of ministers. With him, Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri too resigned from the council of ministers. Shri Chandrabhanu Gupta of Uttar Pradesh Government also resigned from the post of chief minister. In this way, several more leaders tendered their resignations.

Now Babu Jagjivan Ram was totally free of the responsibility of union cabinet. He had the onus of strengthening Congress which he gladly shouldered, after quitting his post as union minister. He was a strong pillar of Congress organisation even as the Union Transport and Communications Minister. Separating from the council of ministers, for about two years and five months at several places in many provinces of the country he exhorted the people to join congress, telling them about its various programs based on human values.

In the country, wherever his meetings took place, people would assemble in large numbers to hear his logical, realistic and sincere ideas. He used apt, simple and expressive words. He had the distinct quality of conciseness. His language was good and verbal skills were a part of his personality. Babu Jagjivan Ram possessed a good knowledge of Oriya and Assamese languages beside English and Hindi. His proficiency in languages meant that he had little trouble in understanding the problems of the people. As a result, his public relations grew extensive that the whole country was aware of his personality and deeds.

Thus, Babu Jagjivan Ram contributed to the implementation of the Kamraj plan. While he worked to connect the common man

with Congress, he also brought the oppressed classes people to the point where they could not even think of joining any other political group beside Congress, which they joined willingly.

On 03 May 1969, the President of India, Dr. Zakir Hussain died. Shri V. V Giri was the vice-president of the country then. He took over as the acting president of India. Shri S. Nijlingappa was the President of the All India Congress committee while Smt. Indira Gandhi was the Prime Minister of the country. To decide the question as to who should become the President of India, on 12 July 1969, a meeting of the congress parliamentary group was convened in which Shri Niglingappa presided over the session. The name of Shri Neelam Sanjiva Reddy was proposed but Fakhruddin Ali Ahmad opposed the move, suggesting the name of Babu Jagjivan Ram for the post of the President of India. Smt. Indira Gandhi approved of this. However no consensus could be arrived at, on the topic of choosing the name of the next President of India and the meeting was over. From here began the process of split in the Congress.

On one side were Nijlingappa, K. Kamraj, S.K. Patil and Morarji Desai, on the other side were Smt. Indira Gandhi, Babu Jagjivan Ram and Fakhruddin Ali Ahmad. Shri Desai was then the Deputy Prime Minister of the country and also looked after the work in the Ministry of Finance. However, on 16 July 1969 Smt. Indira Gandhi freed him from the charge of the finance ministry, advising him to remain only the Deputy-Prime Minister of the country. Refusing this advice, Mr. Morarji Desai resigned from his post. On 18 July 1969, his resignation was accepted by the acting President of India. The same evening, by issuing an ordinance in national interest, 14 banks of the country were nationalised. Such banks as had the capital deposit of less than 50 crore rupees were spared. The nationalised banks possessed about 90 per cent of the capital deposit of all the banks in the country.

On 21 July 1969, V.V. Giri, Neelam Sanjiva Reddy and C.D. Deshmukh filed their papers for election as the President of the country. The Congress was more or less divided now. Where the

President of the Congress (syndicate) Nijlingappa declared Neelam Sanjiva Reddy as his candidate for the post of President of India, (Indira) congress backed V. V. Giri as its candidate for this post. Deshmukh was announced as the candidate of Swatantra Party and Jan Sangha. Elections were held for the post of the President of India and V. V. Giri was declared as the winner.

Congress organisation was split up. Where the senior leaders of this body worked hard to keep the party united, some leaders along with Nijlingappa wanted it to remain divided. Babu Jagjivan Ram and Fakhruddin Ali Ahmad wrote many letters to persuade Nijlingappa otherwise and made efforts to strengthen the organisation but unfortunately the divided components could not be integrated again.

Ultimately Smt. Indira Gandhi and the followers of Babu Jagjivan Ram requested a session of the All India Congress Committee, in the second fortnight of November 1969. There, a prominent leader of Madhya Pradesh, Govind Das, proposed that Nijlingappa be ousted from the Congress. 440 members approved of this and so it was done, Nijlingappa was expelled from the congress. On this occasion. C. Subramaniam was elected as the interim president of Congress (Indira). It was also decided that the 73rd congress session be held at Bombay, from 26 to 29 December 1969.

Accordingly, a huge convention of the All India Congress Committee was held at Bombay, presided over by Babu Jagjivan Ram. On 28 December 1969, he was unanimously elected as the president of the All India Congress Committee. After accepting the post of president of the country's largest political organisation running the administrative machinery, Babu Jagjivan Ram was felicitated not only by flowers and garlands but also the good wishes of crore of people. There were several organisational and political challenges before the Congress now and Babu Jagjivan Ram decided to face them resolutely.

At this 73rd of session Congress, on 28 December 1969, Babu Jagjivan Ram gave a Presidential speech. Some excerpts follow:

"There is a close and historical relation between the Indian National Congress and this big city. Here, Congress was born about 85 years ago. Here Mrs. Annie Besant, had called a secret meeting of Congress leaders—including Lokmanya Tilak and Surendranath Banerjee, in which she had inspired all to join the 'Home Rule League' a few days before Lord Sinha presided over the session. Here, Congress had celebrated its golden anniversary and the country's noble son and great Congress President, Jewel of the Nation, Dr. Rajendra Prasad had presided over the 1934 session. Here Mahatma Gandhi, in August 1942, had raised the revolutionary slogan – 'Britishess, Quit India.'[40]

Pleading against the party being split, Babu Jagjivan Ram spoke thus, "Let us not forget that muck cannot clean away the muck. Therefore, I will not reply to scorn by scorn, temptation with temptation and curse, swearing back. Here, I would like to remind all my colleagues, of Lord Buddha's words:– 'swearing is like spitting against the direction of the wind, it comes back upon you'. Despite everything, there has been talk of unity and it still goes on. Where this desire is for the future of the organisation and democracy, I welcome this move. Still, the issue remains that unity should be connected to that purpose which it is meant for and which is gained. Congress has reached the stage where it has to adopt either the path of basic changes, revolutionary policies or disintegration. On the occasion of being elected as the Congress President, I had said that the door of unity was open. I repeat that statement here. We welcome such persons to join us as are unconditionally committed to our ideals, policies and programs. Only this can be the basis for unity, I do not see any other way at the moment. It is not only the Congress that is in jeopardy, the country is passing through a situation where, all the political parties are facing, in a pragmatic way, internal differences of opinion and divisions. These internal differences of opinion are, in a way, expressions of tendencies of conflicts and the challenges and the functioning of a developing country. The concern is that this tendency should not lead towards the destruction of the democratic structure. This can pose danger to the democratic programs of the different groups and the stability of governments.

If, in any way, the internal conflicts and differences of opinion among the political parties produce magnetic attraction then this inclination deserves to be welcomed and I would welcome such expansion. On this occasion, I invite all progressive forces with belief in our ideals to join our organisation."[41]

Pointing to the structure of the Congress organisation, Babu Jagjivan Ram observed, "this session fulfills in a way, Mahatma Gandhi's wish, though not fully but partially, not in form but in spirit. This announces the advent of a new historical era in Congress. This indicates towards another transformation. Just like Mahatma Gandhi's Congress in 1920 was a new Congress and yet old Congress too, in the same way, this congress is a new Congress and yet it is old also. It seeks the way to transform itself into an instrument of revolution and change. With clarity and immutability, it is committed towards democracy, socialism and secularism, we all are committed. Any law of the country that blocks the path of these ideals should be repealed or suitably amended. Any social, economic or political power that poses an obstacle should be moulded and made amenable to serving the general purpose.... we will get rid of our conflicts. We will remove difference of opinions from our midst."[42]

Analysing democracy in the country, Babu Jagjivan Ram said, "Like Lord Buddha and other sages, Mahatma Gandhi was also distressed by the misery of the people, be they in any part of the world. It was his fervent desire to wipe each tear from every eye. Non-violence is our law, violence is the law of the ruthless. The laws of non-violence, truth, love and sympathy apply to communities, countries and nations. Before seeking change in others, we should change our own selves. This is not mere talk but the principles of life which Mahatma Gandhi adhered to and sacrificed his life for. Mahatma Gandhi gave a new meaning to traditional thinking and ideals. Pandit Nehru accepted certain teachings of Mahatma Gandhi and sought to link those with modern sciences, mechanics and industrialisation. Pandit Nehru emphasised that for building a modern industrial society, India should adopt Mahatma Gandhi's life values. Multi–purpose river-valley projects,

steel, electricity, manure, heavy-electricals, and machinery production industries which Pandit Nehru fostered lovingly, terming them as the 'modern temples'. These were live examples of his foresight as regards a progressive and developed India. To promote the idea of world peace is undoubtedly a Gandhian inspiration. The policy of disarmament, despite being an ideal, is very practical in today's circumstances. A country's foreign policy is possibly a reflection of its inner strength and weaknesses. We are committed to democracy, socialism and secularism as these are the three pillars upon which the Indian National Congress stands. We all feel that in a traditional backward society, without socialism, democracy means the establishment of an administration of the privileged, by the privileged and for the privileged. We know that socialism is a kind of ancient Indian ideal and not a heritage of the West. Equal respect for all religions is inherent in the intellectual structure of our country. Unfortunately, humane and liberal Indian ideas could never be moulded to a form in the social structure and applied to behaviour in regular life. The west incorporated these in life. The ideology that man is born with certain inalienable rights has strengthened the foundations of the democratic society in the west and that is how the western countries have progressed. The Indian society wilted due to self created and preserved disparities and disrespect for people. Yet the modern man deserves to inherit that which is supreme and good in all humanitarian ideas and in this way our democratic socialism is a combination of all good ideologies of the east and the west."[43]

In the perspective of communism and the social structure of the country, the rural order has been considered as basic since 80 per cent of the country's total population lives there. Providing direction for improving the condition of the villagers, in particular the landless labour and strengthening the agrarian economy, Babu Jagjivan Ram commented: "What to do? Let us start from the base. It is true that the process of production determines the distribution system. Therefore, if the economic forces in the village areas are to be made egalitarian then new techniques of production should be adopted. Rural leadership today is of the upper and middle level

farmers and small farmers and landless labourers have no place in this. Till now, there are the same old landowners who have been transformed into upper-level farmers ruling over the village. There are still the same old dominant castes who continue to predominate rural life. The governmental machinery is working to preserve in a permanent form, the prevalent system, reflecting the class-structure of caste and rural life, (if not as a subordinate then) by way of assistance. This all has to be changed. New leadership has to come forth and at the village level, those local people who contribute to development and are sincere should be made the reliable representatives. In these workplaces, such people should be there who are hungry, are ready to work, have less or no irrigable land and also no means of production. The workplace should be as the soil of the land. The growing tension in the villages expects immediate solutions. If the increasing agricultural production is to be kept up in a progressive manner, Land reforms can no longer be delayed. Doing away with the touts, fixing the farm boundaries and the distribution of the surplus as well as government land amongst the landless farm-labour should be done quickly."[44]

Babu Jagjivan Ram always struggled for social justice and the human rights of the people from the oppressed classes. Putting forth some suggestions at the session, he said: "the problems of the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes cannot be fully solved until the social structure is basically reorganised. This will take a long time. Yet, the sphere of welfare schemes and the process of their implementation inspires much thinking. It is hoped that when there is improvement in the condition of these communities then they will expect to live their lives like civilised human beings. It is also hoped that with the awareness of their rights and increasing understanding, they will reject the unjust prior behaviour. However, wherever such an inclination has been expressed, particularly in the rural areas, the atrocities and harassment has been as before. This exposes the truth that there has been no real change in the mindset of the high-caste people. There has only been a dissatisfactory adjustment – I have no quarrel with them but I do want them to admit that fundamentally their tendency is in no way conducive to the broad tendencies in

the society....... For (oppressed) classes seats have been provided for ten more years. Constitutional reservation is a step in the right direction but several steps... shall have to be taken. All types of behaviour that separates the scheduled castes from the upper caste Hindus and discriminates in permanent forms against them should be brought to an end. There should not be separate houses for those from scheduled castes. In cities and villages both, they should have mixed accommodation. All students of the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes should be generously given scholarships, promoting technical education, they should be provided such education and they should be assured of being provided suitable representation in government services."[45]

After the session, a meeting of the Congress high committee was held at Bombay, in which the solutions with regard to land reforms were discussed. According to the decision taken, special instructions for land reforms were conveyed to the state government. In a *harijan* meeting at Kurwai, in his presidential speech, Babu Jagjivan Ram said, "the farm land is of the one who works on it."[46] His statement elicited strong reactions and many land-owners in the Congress itself were discomfited at this. Babu Jagjivan Ram was strongly in favour of securing rights for the landless labourer.

After a cabinet reshuffle on 29 June 1970, Babu Jagjivan Ram became Defence Minister of the country. In the second week of August 1970, a session of the All India Congress Committee was organised at Patna. At the session, two historical decisions were taken. The first decision was to ask government to provide at least five lakh employment opportunities for the unemployed and the second decision was that all the plots of land in the country on which no farming is being done should be distributed among the landless people by the end of 1971. The Congress governments (union and in states) distributed a large number of plots among the landless people. This distribution system benefited the landless labourer.

The hour of reckoning drew near. On 24 December 1970, a meeting of Congress High Committee was held under the

presidentship of Babu Jagjivan Ram. It was decided that the government be advised to dissolve the Lok Sabha and mid-term elections be held. Accordingly, under the leadership of Smt. Indira Gandhi, an emergency meeting of the Union council of ministers took place on 27 December 1970 in which, accepting the counsel of the Congress high-committee, it was decided that the President of India be requested to dissolve the Lok Sabha. The same night, the President of India announced the dissolution of Lok Sabha.

Now came the opportunity for Babu Jagjivan Ram to display his electoral capabilities. While Congrss was trying its utmost to defeat Babu Jagjivan Ram's Congress in the mid-term polls, he toured the country extensively. During his election tours, he addressed numerous meetings and told people about his organisation's clear policies and programs. Huge crowds would gather to hear his speech. His simple and emotive language would touch the hearts of people. People would wait till late at night, if he got delayed. Such was his influence. In a big election rally in Karolbagh at Delhi, Babu Jagjivan Ram stated that in this mid-term poll for the Lok Sabha, "we will win over 320 seats." His statement caused a stir the next day, among the political organisations. Who knew that this was not merely a prophecy but the correct evaluation of the poll scene.

Lok Sabha poll results were declared. Congress J-(headed by Babu Jagjivan Ram) had secured the maximum 350 seats, gaining two-third majority.[47] Nijlingappa Congress could win only 16 seats. Babu Jagjivan Ram defeated by almost two-lakh votes, Shri Mahavir Paswan in the Sasaram parliamentary constituency.

The Congress had gauged the public mood well. For all-round development of the country, now the need was to implement such programs as had been kept directly before the public. These came to be known as the 20 points program, in the formulation of which, Babu Jagjivan Ram had a prominent role. These were as follows (1) reduce prices and make clear the storage position, (2) direct fixation of the irrigable land and land re-distribution, (3) housing arrangement in rural areas, (4) to end the practice of bonded

labour, (5) loanwaiver for villagers, (6) fix minimum wages for the farm labour, (7) better irrigation facility for better harvest (8) more electricity for increased production, (9) promoting handicrafts, (10) better textiles for more people, (11) socialisation of city land, (12) fixation of property value and punishment to tax-evaders, (13) confiscate the property of smugglers, (14) simplify the process of capital investment in industries, (15) labour partnership in industries, (16) national permit scheme for road traffic, (17) tax-concession for the middle class, (18) essential commodities at controlled rates for students, (19) fixation of price of books and stationery and (20) increase in employment opportunities and training.[48]

All the union ministeries and the chief ministers of the states were given instructions under the of Prime Minister of India, Smt. Indira Gandhi for the implementation of all the programs given. All these programs were implemented with enthusiasm, sincerity and devotion, yielding good results.

In this way, as the president of the Congress, while Babu Jagjivan Ram secured for it more than two-thirds of the seats in the mid-term Lok Sabha polls, on the other hand, he played a prominent role in several programs for the all-round development of the country. Definitely, such historical accomplishments could only come about due to his amazing talent, multi-faceted personality and devoted sincerity.

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The Golden Laurels

DURING the freedom-movement, Babu Jagjivan Ram represented the oppressed classes duly. He knew well that people from the oppressed classes would contribute actively in bringing about a political and economic revolution in the country in the scenario of the struggle for independence. He emerged as a crusader for social justice and equality. Championing the cause of the oppressed classes, on 02 September 1946, he assumed charge as the Labour Minister in the interim cabinet. The names and the portfolios of those included in this interim cabinet[1] were:

Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru	Foreign Affairs and Commonwealth
Sardar Baldev Singh	Defence
Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel	Home and Broadcasting
Dr. John Mathai	Finance
Dr. Rajendra Prasad	Agriculture and Food
H. Asaf Ali	Communications, Transport and Railways
Jagjivan Ram	Labour
Sir Safat Ahmad Khan	Health, Education and Arts
Sayyed Ali Zahir	Parliamentary Affairs, Post & Telegraph and Aviation
C. Rajgopalachari	Industries and Supply
C.H. Bhabha	Commerce

On 15 August 1947, India gained Independence. Babu Jagjivan Ram again became the Labour Minister, this time, of a free India. He set about to either amend all such laws which posed a hurdle to labour welfare or replace them with new Acts of labour welfare. Discussing the pillage and exploitation by the industrialists, he

observed, "although on 15 August,1947 we have gained political freedom but we have still been unable to obtain economic liberation. Eradicating poverty and illiteracy is actual freedom but it is also implicit that the millions of labourers in the country be provided suitable shelter, a healthy environment and at least two meals daily. This can only be possible when industrialists and labourers, like brothers behave and appreciating the difficulties of the labourers, the industrialists will check accumulation of capital in merely a few hands."[2]

While on one hand, Babu Jagjivan Ram laid emphasis on improving the quality of products, on the other, he advocated the cause of labourers unity. He wrote, "we cannot ignore the labourers who are not in a position to place their demands and apprehensions before the industrialists, public and the government. The government has to come forward to assist them and take steps to improve their work-conditions while there is conflict between the labour-class and the capitalists. If I have to explain more clearly then I will say that a large number of labourers are engaged in mines, plantations, and villages in the country. Their condition, in view of their illiteracy, lack of information and helplessness is quite unsatisfactory."[3]

Babu Jagjivan Ram promoted the concept of treating labour-class as partners in industries. In the history of the country, for the first time, the agricultural and plantations labourers were organised through unions. He asserted that the unions fighting against labour exploitation be provided recognition. When he saw that some employers create obstacles in recognising or entering into agreements with such labour organisations too, which do fulfill all the eligibility criteria, he amended the Trade Unions Act. After this, the employers were left with no option but to recognise labour unions and per force enter into agreements according to the labour demands.

Babu Jagjivan Ram believed that it was logical to solve the

industrial disputes by talks and agreements between the employers and employees. To provide a concrete shape to such thinking and solve labour problems, he constituted tripartite committees for coal, textile, jute, leather products and cement industry. Meanwhile, the plantation committee entered into an agreement with the labourers, employers and the government, to frame laws for improving the lot of the labourers, increase their wages and provide health services for the millions of labourers working on the plantations of tea, coffee, rubber and sincona products.

With zeal, devotion and through several meetings of the tripartite committees between the representatives of labour unions and the employers, with national interest as supreme and aware of the importance of increase in national production on a collective scale, Babu Jagjivan Ram exhorted for a three-years industrial truce. Thus he created a cordial atmosphere between the labour-class and employers and alongside, also generated among them, sentiments of nationalism and patriotism. In India, Babu Jagjivan Ram occupies the foremost position as the leader responsible for the improved relations between labour-class and employers and also giving a concrete shape to the concept of labour-class as partner.

Babu Jagjivan Ram undertook several measures to improve the conditions of the mine-labour. In 1948, he constituted the Coal-mines Industrial Committee. It was a tripartite one, having representatives of the mine-owners, labourers and the government. The Committee's work as regards the mine-labour included determining minimum wages, discussing their health issues and protection from hazards and making recommendations to the government for amendments in the existing rules and laws.

Babu Jagjivan Ram completely amended the 1939 Regulation as regards safety in coal-mines and the 'Indian Coal-Mines Regulation 1926', giving full attention to new situations and technical advancements. Keeping the children's welfare in mind, he also amended the 1946 Act in favour of meternity relief and acted to provide a conducive environment for the development of children. He was of the opinion that increase in industrial production naturally increases the per-capita income consequently improving

people's standard of living. He wished to improve the production rate and the quality of products and services but not at the cost of labour-class interests.

On 10 February 1947, presenting the Industrial Disputes Act in the House, Babu Jagjivan Ram observed, "the purpose of this Act is to establish cordial relations between the labourers and the employers. I do not want to give a speech on this. If need be, then later I will discuss such points as may surface during debate. With these words, I present this bill for the house's consideration.... Sir, the bill has come from a select committee... I would like to thank all the honourable members who have assisted the select committee. Sir, I have listened carefully to the arguments of my friends who claim to represent the labourers but I believe that all the arguments being given now are the ones given when I had referred the draft of this bill to the select committee. I am afraid that if I try to reply to all the points then I will probably be repeating in general, those very arguments as I have already put forth earlier. Therefore, Sir, I will not try to reply to all the points as have been raised... I make no claim to be a revolutionary, neither do I claim this bill to be a revolutionary one. It is an ordinary measure and I am of the opinion that it is more in accordance with labour-class interests than the employer's. My friend, Shri Joshi who has spent a major part of his life in the midst of a section of the labour class of the country— when I speak of a section of the labour class then I mean that he has worked labouriously, to a certain extent but only with the industrial labour—is not reassured. When he criticises the noteworthy measures, then I fear, Sir, that he thinks only from the perspective of the industrial labour, to an extent, factory labour and that labour class which is organized... I want to make it clear that only factory workers do not represent all the labour classes in this country."

Beside factory, there are a number of labour classes and other categories. We cannot overlook the unorganised labour. Very few labour-class leaders have been concerned with improving the lot of this class and organising them. While considering measures, we

should pay attention to this huge mass of labour classes in the country who have been neglected by the government and the labour-unions leaders. These measures may not be as essential for the labourers who are organised and in a position to table their demands and concerns before the employers, public and the government but for the unorganised labourer who cannot even think of asserting himself, who cannot even get the government or the employers to listen carefully, to his demands and concerns, these measures are quite necessary. It is imperative that the government come forward to their assistance and make efforts to improve their wages and work conditions in case of labourer-employer conflicts. If I am to speak more clearly then I will say that a large number of labourers are working in mines, in plantations and more than that, millions of agricultural-labour works in the villages. As my respected friend from the Opposition has observed correctly, the condition of the labourers is quite unsatisfactory, considering their illiteracy, lack of information and helplessness. I was listening carefully to the points that my friend Mr. Griffith raised but I found that in the later half of his speech, he has contradicted the first half of his own speech. He began with the statement that we are trying to imitate the standards of the western countries who, in comparison to India are much more industrialised. He commented that in India, the labourer is illiterate, un-informed and helpless. This is a logical line of thinking which implies the Works Committee needs to be constituted. If the labourer is illiterate, uninformed and helpless then it becomes all the more reasonable to not abandon them to fight for their cause, on their own, with the employers who are quite capable, informed and strong. If I also agree with Mr. Griffith then it means that all these illiterate, uninformed and helpless labourers be left at the mercy of the employers and the government... The labour representative raised a strong objection in the house as regards an essential judicious system. So far as agreements or negotiations are concerned there are no two opinions on the matter, in this house. The intention of the government definitely is to encourage voluntary negotiations and this is why, the purpose of this bill is to promote voluntary

labourer - employer negotiations. A first step towards it would be to constitute a Works Committee so that there are more possibilities for labourers and the employers to discuss the points of differences for compromises and reconciliations. The demand is to consider these Works Committees actually as the labour representatives... I would like to direct the attention of the honourable members towards such provisions according to which the Works Committees are formed and one point which they had objected to. Only labourers constitute the Works Committees. In the industries where the labour unions are present, representatives will be selected on their advice. This will clearly influence the labourers to become organised and their efforts would promote the establishment of unions. Therefore, personally, I feel that the provisions relating to this bill would promote the growth of unions in the country. The second point was that the liaison-officers promote the process of voluntary compromises and agreement beside the provision of enquiry. This would only be at the last stage although the final decision shall be binding and in several cases, this would be in labourer's interest.

In this bill the industries are divided into two categories of those serving public interest and the rest. In the perspective of this bill, the difference between these two types of industries is that it shall be compulsory to give prior notice to the industries acting in public interest while this is not so, in the case of the other industries. I do not consider it essential to explain the details of the necessity to give notice as regards the former. On the basis of the experience of the last seventeen years, the government has included the Railway as such. I do not think that any person with knowledge of the need for its services would oppose the inclusion of railway in that category. So far as the other industries are concerned, I would like to say that the purpose of including them in the list is definitely not one of the government's sympathy towards them or their owners. They have been included in the list only to benefit the common man. Which are these industries? Coal is an important industry. Today it is quite necessary that such services as are important to people be maintained well. Everyone would want that an important industry like coal should

be nationalised. Yet, should we brush aside such important industries just because they have not been nationalised? Today, we read in the newspapers about coal-shortage difficulties in Great Britain and we know well that our own coal-production is not up to our needs, as a result of which the production of other items is affected adversely. We have included the cotton industry in this list, not out of sympathy with the mill-owners but only because according to our information, cotton fabric is in short supply and even one day's obstruction in the working of the cotton textile mills would amount to depriving nearly seven lakhs of people of their annual share of cotton clothes. I have nothing to say about the food industry. About the iron and steel industry, I will say that during the last six-seven years of war in the country, the problem of unemployment in the country could have been tackled by the construction of factories, houses and other buildings but the work was brought to a standstill. It is very important for improving the labourers lot. Personally, I feel that all these important industries viz. coal, iron and steel should have been nationalised. However, as I have said already, we cannot wait any longer and neither will we want to since, by the time that the process of nationalisation of these industries is completed, the situation may change. Therefore, these industries have been included in the list. Since we have considered these industries, in emergency situation, for a certain time-period.... as in public interest therefore I do not feel that the provincial governments would take any unfair advantage from this list, beside the fixed profit. Thus, opposing the proposed amendments to this bill, I strongly emphasise that this bill be adopted in its present form only."[4] Ultimately the bill was passed by the House.

After implementation of the constitution in the country, the first general elections were held in an independent India. The Congress manifesto mentioned several reforms in public interest. In this election manifesto, it was mentioned that the State would guard the interests of the industrial labourers and under the prevailing economic conditions, so far as is possible, in accordance with those in the other developed countries, arrangements would be

made for minimum wages, a higher standard of living, housing, suitable work-hours and work-place facilities. The State would also establish a suitable institution for resolving the conflicts between labourers and the industrialists and protect against economic hardships during old age, sickness and unemployment.[5]

As the Labour Minister, Babu Jagjivan Ram, believing this manifesto to be the avowed intent of the All India Congress Committee, undertook several measures to improve the condition and financial standard of labourers. For a solution to the housing problems of the lakhs of mine-labourers instead of relying only on governmentat-regulations and the agreements between the labour organisations and the mine-owners, he got built under his personal supervision and instruction, thousands of modern well-ventilated houses. For labourers welfare, he also arranged clean drinking water, playgrounds, markets, schools, health-centers and creches. He extended such facilities, for welfare, not only of the mine-labourers but also for the lakhs of labourers in almost all the major industries.

During Babu Jagjivan Ram's ministerial stint, among the laws enacted for labour welfare, main were - Industrial Employment Act-1946, Mica Mines Labour Welfare Fund Act-1947, The Industrial Disputes Act - 1947, Dock Workers Act-1948, Factories Act-1948, Coal Mines Provident Fund and Bonus Schemes Act-1948, Industrial Disputes (Appellate Tribunal) Act-1950, Plantation Labour Act-1951, Employees Provident Fund Act-1952, Coal Mines (Conservation and Safety) Act-1952, The Minimum Wages Act-1948 and Employees State Insurance Corporation Scheme.

At the thirty-third session of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in Geneva, in his presidential speech, calling out for social peace and social justice in the whole world, Babu Jagjivan Ram observed, "I feel overwhelmed on such occasions. An old lady had once remarked to me, "it must feel so nice to sit on this chair, like a gentleman." I replied, "yes, only for a few hours." She retorted, "no, not for a few hours but for a few weeks." In Indian history, we had heard a tale that whoever sat on king Vikramaditya's throne became a gentleman. Therefore I am grateful to that revered lady who reminded me that if I am a gentleman for

a few weeks, it is only because I am sitting on a high chair. Like Mr. Rens commented just now that for sometime, you have to work like a football team, in this House. For that, you will definitely need a referee and if he does not know the game then he cannot play his part. However, to play his part in the game, he should be prepared for some kicks. Yes, I know the game but I am sorry that I did not get kicked. If, sometimes, I have been the cause of worry for certain members in this House, then it is because I had to maintain the dignity of the chair. No member of this House should compromise the power, dignity and security of this chair because the moment you harm it in any manner, you will be branded as the one who has scorned the house. At this time, I would not want there to be a repetition of the mention of the achievements of the Assembly. You know these well although it will not be out of place for me to say that certain decisions taken here, may perhaps not be of much significance in this part of the world but they are definitely important for the less-developed countries, for example, the issue of agricultural-labour, professional and technical training. However, you have also taken such decisions here which are of importance to the developed countries too from the industrial perspective as regards equal wages and unemployment, Today, the world is standing at crossroads. In future, human welfare will be determined on the basis whether we want to adopt the path of cooperation or conflict. If the team has the spirit of cooperation then I have not the slightest doubt that man is capable of finding the solution to any problem. As my friend, Narwai observed, today, the issue is that we have to advance in a normal way, towards social peace. Ordinary peace, without social peace, cannot be termed as peace at all. ILO is trying to establish social peace and social justice in the world. However, to me, this appears to be quite strange and improbable because while making attempts to achieve social peace and realise the social dimensions of justice, we find ourselves in situations of conflict and resistance. The reason for this is that social peace and social justice are related. When you want to establish social justice and social peace, then it is essential that the privileges in the prevalent social order be reduced or done away with. In this, we may face some opposition

still, we shall have to create such circumstances in ILO and outside it, for social justice to become possible so that we can be successful in establishing social peace and the ultimate peace. Once more, I would like to repeat the belief that the feeling of cooperation and teamwork which have prevailed in this Assembly, not being restricted to the walls of this auditorium, may touch upon the international and the national tasks, eliminate conflicts and promote peace."[6]

Keeping labourer's interest in mind, Babu Jagjivan Ram also emphasised upon social security. Speaking at the inauguration ceremony of the Employees State Insurance Corporation, he observed, "... We are beginning our journey on the long path of social security. Social security is a new concept in the development of social philosophy and universal view considers it to be the only defence against social and economic upheaval. Through the means of social security, society searches for ways of defence against certain dangers always present, against which, the society finds itself helpless. In this way, the state has to come forth and shoulder the responsibility of providing the basic and primary security to the masses, for general welfare in the economic sphere. In the perspective of the conditions in India viz, sickness and epidemic, high mortality rate among mothers and infants, lower life-expectancy, worries and extreme poverty—the reasons for which are, inherited debts and other components—it appears impossible that the provisions of social security can check this, probably, only a miracle can do that. Staggering poverty and the lack of development are other components which pose obstacles in the path of giving concrete shape to the plan of social security. Therefore, anyone can pose a question as to whether India can afford to spend on development of social security? Not saying much else, I would quote Sir William Beveridge, the propounder of the British social security plan, who was once asked a similar question. His reply was simple. He said, "I am often asked if, from the point of view of expense, Britain can adopt the Beveridge plan? My reply is the catch in the question if a school- kid is asked whether he has stopped beating his mother? This is imagination,

not the truth. It is a concept like the wise distribution of your income indicating some expenses. Now, in my view, the distribution of income is not harmful at any cost because before spending on the less significant items, you spend on the more important ones first. Then it is a wise expenditure. When people ask as to whether Britain can spend on the Beveridge plan, it is like asking a housewife as to whether, before buying the radio, can she buy bread for her home? Definitely, she can do that and so she should." Sir William further emphasises that the more poor the country, more is the need there for social security. Therefore, you will agree that social security is quite a significant desirable objective and a very important national issue too. Still, none should form an opinion that the point we are making so emphatically today is like an extensive plan of social security. I have made no such claim. This is only the beginning—a simple beginning—the first step, according to a concept, towards the objective. Our plan has two limitations; first, it has not covered all the dangers which may affect an insured employee and second, it can be executed only for small groups of population viz employees of organised sectors. In all the necessary measures, we are considering health insurance and medical assistance and we are going to start from here. As we gain experience, we will extend the scope of this plan so that in its final form, being implemented in totality, it can give due benefits. Thus, we are going to plant a tiny tender sapling today, it has the potential for full growth and in its own time, it will assume the form of a big tree, providing shelter and refuge to the needy. In this way, you will agree that though our beginnings are small yet it is like the foundation stone of a large fort, the fort that an independent country is constructing for its economic freedom. On this occasion, I have not forgotten about the large number of agricultural labourers who are more in need of uplift but for whom we have not been able to do much. Their claim to amenities cannot be swept aside and no plan of progress or security can be effective unless it covers them too. But here, we have to advance in the face of obstructions and difficulties that create apprehensions which force us to stop and ponder before executing any plan. Maybe we need a totally different type of plan for the agricultural

labourers. To make the plan effective, we shall have to study the problems in-depth. First of all, keeping in mind our fiscal order, we have to determine the cost of implementation. This will take time but it does not mean that I am not pondering over it. None can stop me from getting for the agricultural labourers, their legal rightful since the whole life of the country depends on their sweat and toil. The Corporation's jurisdiction is limited for now. At first glance, according to the rules of its establishment, it covers all regular factories. It provides five types of benefits-sickness benefit, maternity benefit, handicap benefit, dependents benefit and medical benefit. These benefits appear ordinary but until area-wise concrete arrangements are made for dispensing these benefits at the right time and managers make appointments accordingly, these benefits will not reach the labourers. Therefore it is essential that the system be decentralised. Area offices have to be set-up in large numbers and there should also be a head-office where the records of sickness and benefits of the insured labourer, of all areas shall be kept. Beside this, some local offices also have to be established which, on the basis of the instructions issued by the regional offices, shall provide assistance to the employee in need."[7]

Babu Jagjivan Ram was of the opinion that this would only be possible when there are cordial relations between the associations of employers and employees. He believed that production as well as labour welfare is important for the progress of the country.

To improve the collective standard of living amongst the labour class, enhance the quality of production and the expansion of industrial units by the employers, Babu Jagjivan Ram, in his capacity as the Labour Minister of such a vast country as India, proved his statesmanship by improving labourer employers relations as per on international standards.

Addressing the session of the International labour Organisation (ILO) at Mysore, Babu Jagjivan Ram said, "I am happy to learn that now ILO is focussing its attention seriously on Asia and its problems. Regional activities are quite necessary but the local needs should not be overlooked. However, regional activities should be covered under international jurisdiction because all should

cooperate in eradication of poverty and not just those who are badly affected. ILO shall have to show the world that it is desirous and capable of making the necessary contributions in solving problems. More than half of the world's population lives in Asia—most are poor. I have read, with interest, the plans and proposals prepared by ILO and its special agencies for economic reforms in the less-developed countries. These plans should not remain only on paper. Work should begin on these and effectively so, Asia is looking and waiting. At the Asian Regional Conference in New Delhi, our Prime Minister had expressed dissatisfaction, observing that Asia was not represented in it as was its due. In particular, we had discovered then that Indonesia was not represented. It is a matter of satisfaction for us that now Indonesia is a free country. Therefore it is in a position to become a member of this organisation and can play its role in promoting social justice. We will look forward to the presence of Indonesia's representative in the future meetings of the ILO. India's geographical location brings us in close contact with other Asian countries. We cannot live in isolation. Therefore, we have to keep in constant touch with our neighbouring countries. In particular, we are keen to maintain close ties with the people of China since they have been our friends and well-wishers, for centuries. I am sorry that in this session, no representative of such a large nation as China, is present. I am also disturbed by the absence of the Labour Ministers of Pakistan and Sri Lanka, who were unable to come, due to some important tasks in their own countries. I greet my friend, the Labour Minister of Burma (Myanmar), on my own and the people of India's behalf. I hope that this session of ILO shall bring the people of Asia closer and that Asia would also get close to the ILO so that peace and goodwill prevails all over the world."[8]

Presenting the Indian Trade Union (Amendment) Bill, in the Parliament on 29 October 1946, Babu Jagjivan Ram had commented that the Indian Trade Union Act 1926 had been totally ineffective. It had been seen that generally there were disputes regarding non-recognition of the labour unions. In the absence of legal provisions, employers cannot be compelled to recognise such unions. Therefore,

Babu Jagjivan Ram explained, "The main purpose of this bill is to secure recognition by the employers, of the trade unions, provided they fulfill the criteria mentioned in Article 28(D). However, an important condition is that such unions be representative in character. Another criteria under the Trade Unions Act is that the unions, seeking recognition, should have been registered for twelve months before the submission of application for recognition. Still, the Industrial Court, established under the provisions mentioned in Article 28(G) of the bill, has the right to de-recognise a trade union if it becomes satisfied that the trade union is no longer a representative one. While the members and the executive officials of the recognised trade unions are entrusted with certain responsibilities and restrictions, there is also the provision for the employers of certain essential conditions regarding such unions. In the same way, cheating by the employers will be considered a crime in such cases as interference with the right of the employees to get organised for forming a trade union; being associated with one or providing assistance to one, encouraging discrimination against the employees connected with a trade union while promoting a campaign of membership of another, punishing employees or giving false evidence in enquiry or in such matters, ignoring the legal provisions of recognised trade unions."[9]

Strike by the employees, against the legal provisions and announcement of lock-out by the employers was considered a crime too. In the industrial world, the influence of this amended Trade Unions Act was such that while on one hand, there were less cases of violation of employees rights by the employer, on the other hand, the employers understood, in-depth, their obligation to keep the industrial relations cordial. This was indeed a revolutionary change.

To improve the work-conditions of the '*godi*' labourers, Babu Jagjivan Ram presented the Dock Workers (Regulation and Employment) Bill in the Assembly on 22 November 1947. This bill also found its distinct place on the scene of social justice. Discussing the bill, he said, "the conditions of employment of

the dock-workers depend on the arrival of the ship and its cargo. While there are the factors of uncertainty and timing as regards the arrival of the cargo-ships, there is no permanent employment for the labourers working on that ship as well. The in-charge of the ship, when in need, calls the workers over and the extra ones are returned bare-handed. As a result, that day, many do not get, work on either the ship or anywhere else. In this way, it creates bitterness among the labour-class which sometimes poses a serious problem. We have been thinking for a while whether we can come up with a plan that makes permanent, the labourers working on a ship. The solution is a simple provision whereby the Union government may be authorised as regards the labourers working on a ship, to prepare a plan for registering them and ensure that the number of labourers summoned, be according to requirements. Those called over, but for whom no employment is available on the date, should be given half of the wage due or part of it that they may find some other work, for subsistence. The proposed bill shows the path for drafting such plans and the necessary provisions for their implementation as regards the social and welfare measures for the workers."[10]

After the bill was enacted into a law, not only did there come about stability in payment of wages to lakhs of registered labourers but they also began availing the benefit of payment of a fixed amount in case of not finding work on the ship. Definitely, this act was also based on the principle of social justice in the direction of improving the financial conditions of the ship-labourers and it was almost a revolutionary change.

Speaking about the Factories Act, 1948 (implemented in India on 01 April 1949), in the House, Babu Jagjivan Ram stated, "the aim of this bill is not only to integrate the laws regarding work conditions but also to incorporate in it, certain important, novel and useful points. This bill shall bring under its jurisdiction, the units running on electricity where ten or more people work and other such units (not operated by electricity) where twenty or more people work. As a result of this bill extending the work-sphere, while the number of units will increase three-fold, there will be

an immediate increase of 25 lakhs to 35 lakhs in the number of those profited. The country is now marching towards the age of industrial development. As far as possible, this industrial expansion should not be limited only to a small number of large units but should also cover the several small units spread all over the country. This is why it is necessary that the law valid for factories should be also implemented in small units. Keeping this point in view, the definition has been broadened. In all industrial units should be enforced, the provisions of hygiene, lighting, ventilation, drinking water, clean toilets, the arrangement of safety measures for those working on machinery, regular hours of work, weekly holiday, restrictions on child labour and reduced work-hours for teenagers.[11] Implementation of this Act led to measures in defence of labour interests in the country and attempts were also made to bring the worker-efficiency and calibre up to the international standards.

In 1966, Babu Jagjivan Ram presented the Contract Labour Bill in the House with the aim that the custom of contractual labour be done away with and in industries, better work conditions be enforced. In December 1966, for the all-round well-being of labour class, Babu Jagjivan Ram appointed a National Labour Commission, under Gajendra Garkar. In 1969, this commission submitted its report with several recommendations to the government.

Thus, as a competent Labour Minister in India, Babu Jagjivan Ram dealt with many challenges of the industrial world. He became the labour minister for the first time on 02 September 1946 in the interim Union Cabinet constituted under Lord Wavell. He worked on the post till May 1952. The second time, he remained the Minister for Labour, Employment and Rehabilitation in the country from 24 January 1966 till 12 March 1967. The third time, when he was the Minister for Food, Agriculture, Community Development and Cooperatives, he was given additional charge as the Minister for Labour, Employment and Rehabilitation from 19 November 1969 till 17 February 1970.

As was mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, for transfer of power from the Britishers to the Indians, Field Marshall Viscount Wavell had on 02 September 1946, constituted an interim Union Cabinet in India, administering oath of office to twelve ministers. In his October 1946 secret report about the ministers to the British sovereign George VI, Wavell wrote about Babu Jagjivan Ram, "Jagjivan Ram, belonging to a low caste from the province of Bihar who is the Labour Minister in the interim Union Cabinet has much impressed me with his quality of high discretion. I have found him to be well-balanced."[12]

Actually, Babu Jagjivan Ram framed several laws in the organised and unorganised sectors against the exploitation of labourers in the country so that collective moves for protecting labour-class interests and stable employment may increase their efficiency, necessary for raising the quality of products in India and the obligations of the capitalists or employers, towards labour may be increased further for cordial industrial relations, industrial peace and social justice for the workers. This was Babu Jagjivan Ram's idea which he always sought to realise constructively, in his capacity as the Labour Minister. In the process of the modernisation of India, Babu Jagjivan Ram's contribution to the labourer's welfare was glorious.

In May 1952, Babu Jagjivan Ram took over the charge of Transport Ministry and remained the Minister for Transport till December 1956. The second time, on 13 April 1962, he became the Minister for Transport and Communications. Proving his immense aptitude, Babu Jagjivan Ram wisely discharged his duties in the departments with such heavy responsibilities. Like the Labour Ministry, this one too was full of challenges as the postal and telegraph services are the indicators of development in a country and are also considered as the symbol of a country's civilisation and culture.

When our country was freed, there were only 23,000 post-offices in all. In the rural areas of the country the postal services were negligible. Babu Jagjivan Ram decided that post-offices should be established in all villages, with the population of 2000

and more people. While establishing the post-office, special care should be taken that to avail this facility, a villager whose village does not have a post office should not have to walk more than two miles from his village. The impact of this policy in providing postal facilities was such that between 31 March 1953 to 31 March 1956, in various villages of the country, about 5,000 new post-offices were constructed.

When he took over this ministry again in April 1962, the total number of post-offices in the country had grown to 76,839 of which 7,326 were in cities while 69,513 were in villages. From 23,000 in 1947, the number of post-offices had increased to 76,839 by 1962. It had all become possible due to Babu Jagjivan Ram's foresight and determination.

During his ministerial stint, for speedy and effective postal services, he substituted 'runner services' with mail motor services. This change improved the post-distribution system not only in villages but in the cities too. It proved beneficial for business, railway, press, central administration and the department of defence.

To strengthen the postal system and encourage people to repose faith in it, Babu Jagjivan Ram promoted the concept of savings. He laid the foundation of the 'post-office savings bank' and exhibiting its benefits, encouraged the people, particularly those in villages, to deposit money in post-offices for earning interest on it. This had two benefits—firstly, the depositor made a profit. Not only was his capital secure but he also earned interest on it from government as a consequence of which, there was an increase in the amount deposited, as well. The other beneficiary of this plan was the government which utilised the amount for current welfare measures. This became a source of revenue for the government, to be put to use in public welfare measures. In public interest, the 'money-order' services in the country were expanded.

Babu Jagjivan Ram encouraged the modernisation process of postage stamps. During his ministerial tenure only, the machine for printing stamps in multi-colour was procured on a priority basis. Emphasis was laid on the pre-requisite of India-produced paper

for stamps. While on one hand, on stamps portrayal of scenes of nature in the country, viz sunrise, moon, galaxy, earth, trees, plants, flowers, fruits and water features were given prominence, priority was also given to displaying on stamps, the portraits of Indian saints, social reformers, patriots, leaders, scientists and philosphers.

The development and expansion of the foreign communication services also took place during Babu Jagjivan Ram's ministerial tenure. Till 31 March 1956, during his ministerial stint, in the first phase of the development of foreign communications service, wireless services had connected India with 22 countries. Wireless, telegraph system and telephone services were considered as the main instruments for linking various countries under international communications system. Through submarine telegraph cable system Bombay, Calcutta, New Delhi and Madras were linked with other nations of the world and these cities were also connected with prominent nations by wireless, telegraph and radio telephone system. The ‘radio photo service’ between India and China was inaugurated with Babu Jagjivan Ram and China’s Communications Minister, Chu Sveh Phan, greeting each other, on 19 October 1954. India’s radio telegram system was directly linked to Afghanistan, Australia, Burma, China, Egypt, France, Germany, Vietnam, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Italy, Japan, Philippines, Poland, Romania, Singapore, Switzerland, Thailand, America, Britain, Soviet Union and Yugoslavia.[13] For promoting public use of the telephone, Babu Jagjivan Ram facilitated the establishment of several telephone centres in India. By December 1955, total telephone centres in the country numbered 759. Along with this, 317 PCOs were established for long-distance calls, 317 offices for local-calls were set up too. In the big cities, the telephone centres were modernised through Atutomatic Exchange.

To extend the benefit of telephone communications facility to the people in villages, Babu Jagjivan Ram ordered the establishment of 1,623 PCO’s. To provide the facility of STD telephone communication services, he set-up about 5,020 'manual trunk boards'. In this way, while expansion of all types of communication services benefited crores of city-folk and villagers in the country,

the government made heavy profits by running these services. Not only this, lakhs of unemployed educated youth found jobs in managing these communication services.

Babu Jagjivan Ram was Communications Minister as well as the Minister for Transport, from April 1962 till August 1963, since at the time, both these departments were under the same ministry. Babu Jagjivan Ram saw to the development and expansion of civil aviation and shipping services in the country.

After the independence of India, in May 1953, Babu Jagjivan Ram presented in the House, the 'Air Corporation Bill', to include the aviation industry in government sector. There was stiff resistance to this bill but ultimately it was passed by a majority in the House. According to this bill, two corporations were established. Air India International Corporation had the responsibility to transport passengers abroad and bring them back to the country, while Indian Airlines Corporation was to discharge its duties with regard to domestic flyers. Thus Babu Jagjivan Ram nationalised the aviation services in national interest. Accordingly, on 01 August 1953, the concerned corporations took over all the eight private sector companies viz. Air India Ltd, Air Services of India Ltd, Himalayan Aviation Ltd, Deccan Airways Ltd, Indian National Airways Ltd, Kalinga Airlines, Airways (India) Ltd. and Air India International.

For international flights, Air India International Corporation bought and fully utilised three super constellation model 1049-G and three boeing-707 jet planes. Later, with the steady increase in international flights, six more boeing-707 and four boeing-747 jumbo jet were bought. In this way there was an increase in the fleet of planes according to the demand for international flights. Several airports were refurbished, several new ones were constructed and for flights, 'runways' were constructed as per international standards.

During the ministerial stint of Babu Jagjivan Ram, aviation agreements were made between India and Britain, Soviet Union, America, France, Afghanistan, Thailand, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Japan, Australia, Burma, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Czechoslovakia, Egypt,

Ethiopia, Germany, Fiji, Hungary, Indonesia, Italy, Kenya, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Lebanon, Netherlands and Philippines. Thus the nationalisation of aviation services strengthened the economy of the country. While the expansion of these services increased the government's revenue, employment was also generated on a large scale. As a result of the implementation of the reservation policy a large number of the educated unemployed youth from the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes were appointed to several posts in the transport and communications department.

Between 1952-53, 16 observatories and 11 radars were set up. Six observatories were also established on the Andaman Islands. Radars were also set up to assess the speed of storms and its impact. 12 radio 'theodolights' and 2 'selometers' were also arranged at the airports for use in the observatories. Shipping was given due importance. During Babu Jagjivan Ram's ministership, the revenue of the Shipping Corporation of India (SCI) increased from 6.13 crore Rupees (in 1961-62) to 10.64 crore Rupees during 1962-63, thus the SCI registered an increase of 31% in revenue upon his being in-charge of the ministry, as compared to the previous year. As compared to 1961-62, the ships bore 37% more load in 1962-63.

In view of the growing demand for ship transport, Babu Jagjivan Ram instructed the SCI to buy 12 new ships from the Hindustan Shipyard Limited. The Corporation also purchased 2 super anchors. Under the expansion plan, the SCI through the medium of shipping transport, proved its ability and expertise in carrying persons and goods, to and from, Britain, Soviet Union, the East African Nations, Japan, Australia, Malaysia, South-East Asian countries, America, Poland and other countries of Europe.

On 23 March 1962, in the discussion on supplementary grants in the Parliament, Babu Jagjivan Ram, in his statement observed, "in the country, today, the problem is not of inefficient or mismanaged transport services but that of shortage of transport. The problem facing us today is of lack of transport and its not being up-to-mark. Rail or road transport, water or shore transport— if we contemplate any means of transport we will find that the

problem today is of shortage... questions have been raised about the transport policy of the Government of India. The honourable members know and in this House, on this topic, reference was made to the fact that the government has set up a committee under Shri Niyogi with the aim to define the long-term transport policy of the Government of India and improve coordination in the functioning of the various means of transport. However, if I am to speak, in general, about the transport policy of the Government of India then I will say that in the prevailing circumstances, the only logical and reasonable transport policy can be one which puts to optimum use, the available means of transport, after establishing coordination between the various procedures and putting in place, a system of checks to prevent the misuse, under-utilisation or destruction of resources.

Niyogi committee was informed of these conditions. The statistical data that it demanded from the Transport Ministry and the States was not immediately available. There are several railway offices where the data is preserved carefully and they provided the railway–related data and the information sought by the committee. However, the Transport Ministry and many State governments are not in a position to immediately furnish the statistic and information about road-transport to this committee. Most road transport is managed by the private sector which did not preserve carefully most of the data being asked for. It is thus clear that to immediately send such data was a tough task for the Transport Ministry and the State governments. Still, as my friend Shri Rajbahadur stated yesterday, the Transport Ministry made available as soon as possible, all the information and data available. So the question does not arise at all, of the concerned cabinet ministry or the state ministries, not cooperating with Niyogi committee. However, according to need, the data and information that the Niyogi committee asked for, could not be supplied before this and I regret that from the way that Shri Niyogi is progressing and collecting the necessary information on a large scale, it seems that this committee will probably not be able to submit its report before the end of the third five-year plan.

This is the reason why I have said that in general, the transport policy of the Indian government seeks, to utilise to the maximum extent, the means of transport available in the country and special care shall have to be taken that we are not deprived of the use of any means of transport. At the time of generating additional transport capacity, we shall have to see that suitable adjustments are made in the areas with scope for transport so that the means of transport are not in excess of the need.

Having said that, I would like to repeat that today the problem is not of inefficient or mismanaged transport but one of shortage. I can confidently say that if my friend, Shri Hari Vishnu Kamath, sometimes given to flights of fancy, keeps this image in mind then he would be able to make out that today the problem in the transport sector is one of shortage instead of inefficiency.

Undoubtedly, many trains in the country are run by the railways and it is only fair that in allocation of amounts under the plan, a necessary part has been apportioned for the railway. Some argue that according to suitable alternative, people should be allowed to use the type of means of transport as they want to. This is only possible in a country which has ample scope for transport but in India, a country suffering from shortage, there is no way that this principle can be followed. We shall have to adjust, at some point.

When we know that there are certain commodities which cannot be borne by all the means of transport then under the circumstances, the alternative of allowing the consumers, to experiment with the type of transport can only be misleading and in principle only. Therefore, we shall have to draw a line somewhere so that for specific kind of goods, the prescribed mode of transport is to be used in that particular area. The other varied means of transport are to be duly adjusted for full utilization so that the other modes of transport available in that area are also fully utilized. For all this, we have offices that seek to maintain a balance between the means of transport be it railways or road-transport. I have always emphasised that when I was in charge of the railways, a campaign was started, of a healthy competition between railways and road transport in the country as there is ample scope for all modes of

transport, in the country. Probably, in no other country but India will we find such a good example of co-existence of the various means of transport. From ponies to the jet planes, all have their work sphere in this country. We are in the age of the bullock cart and we are also in the jet age. Thus, all the means of transport enjoy full opportunity for development. The bullock carts cannot be done away with. Although we have jet planes but we also need the bullock-carts.

In our country, with extensive scope for development of all the means of transport, there is no question of any unhealthy competition between any two means of transport. The only issue is of creating such harmony between them that one works to supplement the other. In my capacity as the Railways Minister I would like to repeat here what I said earlier that there is more scope in our country for all means of transport to co-exist and work to complement each other, without any unhealthy competition.

There are certain offices trying to maintain a balance. I will not say that the balance is complete or stable. Probably, in no country where attempts have been made to establish a balance to a certain extent between the rail and road transports has this become possible. Recently in America, they undertook quite a comprehensive and thorough study of this topic but it remained inconclusive. It was not possible for them to draw a line for making recommendations according to which a balance could be sought. However, as far as possible, we shall have to maintain a balance.

We have a long shoreline and our coastal area is also wider for the advancement of ships. Most of the ships on sea routes are old and it is necessary that new ones be acquired. The Shipping Corporation of India is trying to increase the shipping traffic. In this regard, I would like to reassure the shipping companies that this would be done without harming the interests of the private sector shipping companies. The private enterprises would be made available, as much governmental assistance as they require. Beside this, the Shipping Corporation is also working on the issue of coastal ship-traffic since a decision is due on a long-term policy

for coal-downloading and a certain percentage of coal would have to be transported by ships to the far-off south and west areas. I do not want to describe the statistics in detail. Shri Rajbahadur presented the data yesterday, still I do wish to speak of the general policy.

Water traffic has to be promoted. According to the Constitution, in land water route is a state subject but we can include certain sea-routes in the national water-ways. Till now, we have not constituted an advisory body on the development of any sea-route and I have no doubt that if more interest is taken in this matter, some in land water-routes can be developed profitably which can ease the problem of traffic... There are some plains where a person has to walk for finding a road suitable to reach the railway station, forty to fifty miles away. The union and state governments are taking many steps to improve the network of roads in such areas, still it will take sometime to complete this task, unfinished since several years, I might as well say, several centuries.... There is reasonable progress and we can be proud of the achievements regarding the construction of roads.

A question was raised as to whether a specific amount can be allotted for constructing roads in backward areas or such areas where the transport facilities have not been developed. After distribution among several states through the Central Roads Fund, some fund could be left-over with the Transport Ministry from which it allocates certain amounts for transport development in such areas. I will try to convince the Planning Commission that it may grant an advance to the concerned state governments so that some roads can be constructed in such areas not having enough roads, whether such areas be in hills or plains. The honourable member from Garhwal had described the condition of his area. I think that he was exaggerating about the situation in his area. He is fortunate that in his area, many agencies have constructed roads. Being a border area, the Home Minister is also spending more money on the roads there, and the honourable member is well aware of the facts as to how much, the Home Ministry, Transport Ministry and other agencies have spent on the development of roads in Tehri and Garhwal. It is my belief that

in this regard, he should not have any complaints anymore.

Here, I would also like to discuss that Air India International has earned goodwill in many countries the world over by its commendable work. It is a matter of pride for us that citizens of several countries prefer to travel by Air India International in comparison to airlines of their own countries. This is why, like some honourable members have said, several airlines in the world are not earning a profit and so if today, Air India International is not in a position to repay the interest on loan-advance, I do not think that this should be termed as financial weakness of Air India International. We should not forget that it has earned world fame. I do not have anything further to say on the matter. So far as the issue of enhancing its efficiency is concerned then I can say confidently that the management of Air India International will certainly take the required steps. So far as the question of Indian Airlines is concerned, during the previous year, it has made progress on all fronts—in capacity and efficiency as well... Our Air India International and Indian Airlines Corporation's employees are not inferior to any in the world. In particular, the pilots and engineers have earned fame by their efficiency and competence. I would like to congratulate our pilots, experts in flying aeroplanes, for their efficiency and competence.

Now I will talk about the Department of Post and Telegraph. A suggestion had come that the newly-constituted Post and Telegraph Board should enjoy the same authority and functions as the Railway Board. The Post and Telegraph Board has just been formed and I have no doubt that soon its powers and functions will grow so that it can work more efficiently. We have set up an advisory committee for the Department of Post and Telegraph. It is my wish that there should take place in all areas, meetings between the Dakpal of the area and the Member of Parliament of the constituency. Just like in the Rail Department, for discussing local problems, the MPs and officials of the concerned railway area are contacted, I want that in the same way, the MPs (including the members of Rajya Sabha) should be in touch with the Maha Dakpals of the concerned postal and telegraph areas, whom I would like to call here so that in

consultation with them, quick decisions can be taken on important local issues. Beside this, although there are advisory boards in the areas of our postal and telegraph department yet it is my proposal that at the departmental level there be advisory committees in which may be included the superintendents of post-offices, the state-legislature members and MPs of the constituency, representatives of the local business bodies and other eminent folk, for discussing local issues of importance. So far as telephones are concerned, at different places, we have constituted telecommunications advisory committees for close contact between the consumers and the Department of Post and Telegraph so that the suggestions and criticisms pertaining to reforms in the telephone services can be addressed. A suggestion came that the system of collecting and delivering letters should be speeded up and also a night air-post service be started. I cannot say anything about the night air post services but I want to reassure the house that the air-service will be made effective to the maximum extent possible, in the postal services for all the state capitals and other important destinations. In 1952, we had formulated a policy for increase in the number of post-offices, telegraph offices and telephone centres for extension of the postal, telegraph and telephone facilities. That policy is in operation. However, I have seen that in certain areas such as the hilly or undeveloped areas, even at an annual loss of Rs 750 or 1000 it has not been possible to open post-offices. I have decided that in the very backward areas or undeveloped areas, even at an annual loss of upto Rs 2,500, the post-offices should be opened... Now I come to the telephone system. Its area of complaints is wider. The complaints are said to arise from inefficiency although the demand has increased. Actually the growth in the demand for and use of telephones has been incredible. Until we can generate more channels and give more connections, there does not appear to be much scope for solution to this problem. Again it depends on how much amount is given to us for increasing the number of telephones in the country. We are taking certain steps. When the burden of use of the telephones increases then they are unable to work as efficiently as in normal times. This is why, at such times, while using the

phone we feel irritated at wrong numbers being connected, the calls not getting through or being delayed... During the third five-year plan, we have a definite plan to increase the number of telephones but before the house, I would like to state frankly that the limited means given to us for telephones would probably not be enough. We face the problems of equipments, there is the problems of cables. We have to increase the equipments and cables. For this, foreign currency will be needed. We have to replace the overground wires by putting underground cable. We have fixed plans that have to be implemented. When co-axial cables link Delhi and Calcutta, several people will be able to talk. Simultaneously, then the problem would be over. The same way, co-axial cable will link Delhi and Bombay and then Bombay and Madras. When this plan is complete then the direct subscriber dialling process can begin in the country. I have to make two announcements about telephones. Some honourable members had complained about delayed telephone bills or faulty bills. At present as regards the telephone there are 45 levels of due amount which depends on distances. I want to simplify this. I want to compress these 45 levels into 10 levels. This would be simple for the employees and reasonable for the subscribers. Another move that I am proposing is with regard to the concessional rates in the use of phone. At present, there are several concessional rates of trunk-phones that change according to fixed hours of day and night, from 30 to 40 per cent and 40 to 50 per cent. From the stand point of reason, I would like to bring it down to only two categories—one duration during which full charges are applicable on trunk calls and the other time-period in which only 50 per cent of the amount shall have to be paid. That is why, the rates of trunk calls will be of two types. From morning, eight'O clock till seven'O clock in the evening, the duration will be considered due for full payment of trunk calls but from seven'O clock in the evening till eight'O clock in the morning, the payment will be subject to a concession of 50 per cent in rate. I have done this to counter the difficulties faced in calculations both by the subscribers as well as the employees of the Post and Telegraph Department. It is possible

that the concession of fifty per cent may deprive the telecommunication department of some amount but this is a facility that I saw fit to give and it is my belief that all consumers will welcome this."[14]

Babu Jagjivan Ram became Railways Minister of the country, on 07 December 1956. In those days, the railway department was facing several challenges in the country. On the other hand, in the second five-years plan, considering the development of railways as the primary means to transport, it was given more importance. Therefore, Babu Jagjivan Ram prepared a program of the development of railways, in phases. It was implemented in full during his ministerial stint.

In view of the passenger's comfort, Babu Jagjivan Ram made the railways more comfortable. He saw to the availability of better seats, fans, automatic lights, toilets etc in railway coaches. Babu Jagjivan Ram, made the passenger and goods trains more effective and convenient for speedy transport of the passengers and goods. He focussed also on new lines being laid. In this connection, he gave special importance to such places as were not linked to the railways. During his tenure, railways were started on the newly-constructed 653.39 kilometers of small lines. Not only this, work was underway on laying about 1,609.34 kilometers of big lines and 402.34 kilometers of small lines. Keeping in mind the growth in production of several products as food, textiles, steel, coal etc, 1,500 kilometers of lines were extended. The work of extension of about these many lines was at various levels of construction. A huge bridge was built at the cost of Rs 9.89 crore, between Amigaon and Pandu on the river Brahmaputra. Likewise, between Sonpur and Hajipur, on the river Gandak, at the cost of Rs 1.93 crore, a bridge was built and on 18 October 1960, it was opened for rail and road transport. Rajendra bridge was constructed on the river Ganga and thrown open to rail and road transport. During Babu Jagjivan Ram's tenure as minister, several railway yards were modernised, including Mughalsarai, Ondal, Tatanagar, Bhilai, Raurkela, Adityapur, Durgapur, Dodhara, Ratlam, Vijaywara and Mohua.[15]" Some new railwayyards were also built.

In the future, reduced supply of coal was expected to hit the rail transport badly. Babuji gauged the need for the electrification of rail transport in India like in the other developed nations. In 1925, the Britishers had electrified the railroutes for 240 miles, from Bombay to Kurla. After Independence, Jagjivan Ram decided for the first time, to electrify the 1,500 miles of rail. The electrification of the railways took place between Howrah and Mughalsarai; Howrah and Tatanagar; Asansol and Raurkela; Igatpuri and Bhusaval and Tambaram to Bilva Puram. All significant places in Calcutta were also connected to the railways.[16]

The faster diesel trains ran for the first time during Babu Jagjivan Ram's ministerial stint. As a result of diesel-base and the electrification of railways, according to the needs of the people, railways were run on several routes now. All this was done to increase quality in general, national income and efficiency in transporting passengers as well as goods.

In those days, trains transported about 80 per cent of the products or goods and nearly 70 per cent of passengers. Daily, about 35 lakh passengers travelled by the trains. On 31 March 1956, the length of railways in the country was approximately 24,000 kilometers. About 10 lakh people were working in this department at the time. In view of the capacity of the railways, Babu Jagjivan Ram started 760 additional trains. The route of 525 trains was extended. With a view to link the metropolitan cities to the nearby areas and to make several significant places journey-worthy, the railways were linked thus that the passengers may not face difficulties in reaching the desirable locations and also not crowd the long-distance trains unnecessarily. Thus Babu Jagjivan Ram considered the comfort of the passengers as fundamental.

For the first time in the history of railways, Babu Jagjivan Ram made the arrangements for three-tier sleeper coaches, fully evaluating the comfort of passenger's train journey to far-flung areas in the country. He undertook such reforms as 'super express' goods train, container services, air-conditioned coaches, reduced rail-fare for goods to be exported, etc. measures that promoted trade and commerce in the country and increased passenger facilities.

For self-sufficiency, about 25,000 locomotives, 75,000 rail coaches and 99,000 goods-coaches were connected to the rail transport in the country, during Babu Jagjivan Ram's tenure as minister.[17]

Due to the traffic of passenger and goods trains on the rail routes, there was administrative load on and mis-management in several regional head offices and in view of this, the work of the east-west railway office was bifurcated. On 15 March 1950, a part of the jurisdiction of this office was allocated to the east-west border railway office (at Pandu in the state of Assam). About 2,000 miles long rail routes were put under its jurisdiction. Although the administrative rail routes area of this office was far less then other regional head-offices, but the move was undertaken in view of facilities for people of hilly and distant places.[18]

He connected the rail routes under the area of this management office with the rail routes subordinated to other management offices in the country. Consequently, while the passengers were facilitated, the traders and capitalists also gained the secure facility of speedy transportation of goods. During Babu Jagjivan Ram's tenure as minister, the income of railways increased. For the welfare of the railway-staff, in February 1957, he framed rules for the promotion on 1,70,000 non-gazetted vacant posts which benefited not only the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribe employees but the general category employees as well. Gradually the amended reservation policy was implemented for filling the vacant gazetted posts and promotions in the railways department.

The history of the country would remember proudly Babu Jagjivan Ram's pragmatic measures to eradicate untouchability and caste discriminations. He knew well that in the vast social order of caste hierarchy, the Valmikis occupied the last place. Therefore, he directed all the head offices under the department of railways that priority be given to the Valmiki candidates, in recruitment of persons to serve water to the passengers in trains, on various rail-routes. His historic act provided employment to the poor, less-educated Valmiki youth while gaining success in the direction of eradicating untouchability and caste discriminations.

Although, during his ministerial stint, thousands of educated youths of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes had been appointed directly on the basis of competition to several categories of posts in the railway department, but alongside, for the first time in the history of railway department, he issued directions to enforce the reservation policy also in the promotions of railway-employees in several categories of positions. The orders were promptly carried out. Following the reservation policy in promotions filled up the vacancies under various categories and he also succeeded in ensuring social justice for the railway employees of scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes. In view of their devotion to government service and the dutifulness of the employees belonging to the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes in all government departments of the government of India, as the national leader of the oppressed castes, Babu Jagjivan Ram got orders issued as regards the reservation policy in promotion too and was ever prompt in getting them implemented.

While Babu Jagjivan Ram strengthened the railway department so that the railway employees came forth in a disciplined manner to work for public- interest, on the other hand, for the prosperity and progress of the country, he got additional railway-tracks laid making trains run on diesel and electricity made for speedier transportation and provided impetus to the developing economy of the country. Thus to bring the railway transport system at par with those in the developed nations, Babu Jagjivan Ram modernised the railway, trains and the cabin system therein.

He set several landmarks in the multi-faceted development of railway transport. Babu Jagjivan Ram remained in this ministry from 07 December 1956 till 09 April 1962. After relinquishing the charge of Railway Ministry, in April 1962 he again took over the responsibilities of the Ministry of Transport and Communications, as described in detail earlier. To make the Congress organisation stronger and people-oriented under the 'Kamraj Plan', in August 1963 Babu Jagjivan Ram resigned from the cabinet.

He toured the country extensively during this time and made successful efforts to improve the Congress image among the masses

and connect them to the party. He strengthened the Congress. On 24 January 1966, he was appointed the Labour, Employment and Rehabilitation Minister of the country, for the second time. He remained on this post till 12 March 1967.

The food problem in the country had become alarming with foodgrains being imported from several countries in the world. Due to imbalance in the international trade there was a shortage of foreign currency in India. Less monsoon rains in some parts of the country adversely affected the production of foodgrains in 1961-62. During 1962-63 and 1963-64 the situation worsened. Food production was normal in 1964-65 but during 1965-66 there was a severe drought in the country as a result of which the production of not only foodgrains but also the cash crops was adversely affected.[19] Food sensex, 150.2 during 1964-65 was reduced to 121.4 in 1965-66. Unfortunately, during 1966-67 also, the monsoon rains did not bless the nation,[20].

At such a time, on 13 March 1967, Babu Jagjivan Ram was appointed as the Food, Agriculture, Community Development and Cooperatives Minister of the country. When he took over the charge of this ministry, full of challenges, not only did millions of people in the country welcomed this move but the same evening, with the easterly winds, thick black clouds also welcomed him with heavy rains. With Babu Jagjivan Ram in charge, hope came to the hearts of the people in the famine-stricken country. In Babu Jagjivan Ram's parliamentary debates and his answers to the many questions raised by the honourable members in the parliament, we glimpse his distinguished accomplishments. Reference is being given here, as regards this ministry, of some of his distinct parliamentary discussions.

Discussing the many decisions taken at the conference, of the chief ministers of all the states in India with regard to the food crisis in the country held on 08 and 09 April 1967, Babu Jagjivan Ram gave a statement in Rajya Sabha, on 11 April 1967—

"(1) Necessary measures to be taken in dealing with the current crisis (until the *Kharif* crop is cut by the end of this year).

(2) A Draft Food Budget to be prepared.

(3) Availability, policy and price of the food grain of the *Rabi* crop.

In the conference, actual conditions were analysed and considering shortfall in food-grains as a national problem, a decision was taken to counter it. On the basis of the decision at the consortium meeting in Paris, the chief ministers were informed that efforts were being made to import about one crore ton of food grain during the year. The quantity available would become clear only at the end of the month. The chief ministers were also told that even if, as promised, one crore ton of food grain was imported, it still would not be possible to allocate to the states, from centre's store, a quantity in excess of the present one.[21]

The main decisions taken at the conference are given below—

(1) It is understood that in perspective of the current shortage, it would not be wise to stick to the process of free-trade. Therefore it was felt that regional restrictions in place on free trade in foodgrains between states should continue. Only the movement of Gram-pulse would be free.

(2) The current wheat producing areas, including Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Union-administered Himachal Pradesh, Chandigarh and Delhi (without rationing arrangements) would be divided into different state – spheres. Under the amended system, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh would be considered as separate zones.

(3) It is agreed that in the Draft Food Budget presented at the conference there were some lacunae due to incomplete data on available production and consumption. Therefore, it was understood that to face the difficult situation, it would be essential to advance as before and alongside, attempts be made to rectify the process of collecting data so that later a suitable and correct food budget can be prepared.

(4) It is agreed that rice is less available. Therefore it is unanimously agreed that to increase the availability of rice in the country, efforts be made by both categories of states– surplus-production and deficit production states so that under PDSC (public distribution system) the surplus being collected from the states could be given to the states facing its shortage. It is agreed that in return for 2 lakh ton of imported wheat and barley, Andhra Pradesh would supply the Centre with 6 lakh ton of rice. Punjab government consented to making available to the Centre, 6 lakh ton of foodgrain. Orissa consented to supply the Centre with 75,000 ton of rice and agreed that the state can consider exchanging for wheat more rice than the quantity due as accepted along with supply of wheat by the government of India.

(5) It is agreed that to accomplish this the techniques should be left to the concerned state to make available the foodgrain. However, each state should endeavour to meet the target.

(6) It is agreed that recommendations to the Agricultural Price-Commission for reduction in the purchase price of wheat have ben made. It is determined that further discussions on this issue be held with the states producing mainly *Rabi* crop and thus within a few days, the price for foodgrain under *Rabi* crop be announced.

(7) It is agreed that the corporation's work of gauging the availability and purchase of foodgrains should be scrutinised and the states should try to fulfill the objectives of the Food Corporation. It was emphasised that such efforts be made as enable the Food Corporation to work efficiently and not merely as an additional agent. It is also agreed that the cost of production and the stores of the Food Corporation be checked to see whether the establishment of food corporation is going to lead to a raise in the prices.

(8) It is agreed that a permanent committee be constituted, of the chief ministers of the states with deficit and surplus production to look into the problems of food production.

(9) It is agreed that in view of this year's crisis, it becomes essential that production be increased and for achievement of this objective efforts be undertaken, for raising crop in the maximum area, between the *Rabi* crop being cut and the *Kharif* crop being sown"[22].

After this statement, in response to a question by Shri Niranjan Verma, Babu Jagjivan Ram said, "....When there is shortage of food and also when there is surplus during the crop-season, the price of foodgrain is reduced but increases with the passage of time. In the rural areas, when the prices skyrocket, there are but two-three options. If the state government, during the crop-season, purchases the foodgrain, store it and when prices go up then even in the rural areas, if it opens some shops to provide foodgrain at reasonable cost, the misfortune can be warded off."[23]

To a question by Z.A. Ahmad, during a discussion in the House, Babu Jagjivan Ram replied, "the second thing asked is as to what has been done to prevent hoarding? Then what new steps are to be taken about de-hoarding? The state governments have been given wide authority to confiscate foodgrain and sell it. Such is the law. The thing is that those, in the opposition group, who claimed that no action was being taken, when today, in power, should show grit. We are not going to object. We will praise them, laud their efforts and say that they are doing the right thing. Where people had doubts, I have constantly given the legal reference, to tell them that they have these rights as well."[24]

In response to another question by Z.A. Ahmad, Babu Jagjivan Ram said, "the price has been set for purchase by the government and the price has also been fixed for the consumers to get grain from the ration-shops or at the fair price shops. As for what is to be done for the increasing prices of wheat. As, this has also been deliberated upon for free market, the issue has been decided in some areas but not all.There it is the market forces that work... There are two procedures of distribution as regards the purchase. Ration be distributed among the people in two ways: one is the public distribution procedure that should be through the government agency and the other is where there is trading... Under the public

distribution process, the purchase price given shall be as per the establishment cost in our country. But it will not be appropriate to say that there be control upon the trading in food-commodities."[25]

Responding to another question, Babu Jagjivan Ram said "As far as the question of fixing the price of foodgrain is concerned, the Agriculture Price Commission has set certain principles and on their basis, some prices are also fixed but I had stated in the House before as well that to set the price for agricultural produce, it becomes necessary that it be also seen as to what their cost is, we assess that and then the price be set and for this I have taken steps."[26]

Replying to another question by Shri Rajnarayan, Babu Jagjivan Ram said, "As I just explained, there cannot be uniformity in the policy of governmental purchase. As the state governments assessed their effectiveness, suitable steps were taken. There is also the matter of exemption limit as to what limit, the landed be allowed concession. That also cannot be the same everywhere. Kerala has allowed exemption of two acres. Uttar Pradesh can allow exemption of more acres. Some think of obtaining produce directly from the farmer while others think of getting it from the millers. There are different ways of procurement which people are practising successfully. Bengal folk have decided that the leaders of different political parties will come together to go and request the farmers for foodgrain. In this way, where foodgrain are concerned, the question of procurement is there, uniformity has not been brought about. It has been said that as the situation is, whatever the effective way, grain should be procured."[27]

Responding to Shri Loknath Mishra's question on arrangements for irrigation, Jagjivan Ram said, "there is no doubt that any reasonable person would suggest that production shall have to be given importance first and then clearly the person would agree that the work of distribution begin only after production. Naturally, the work of production has to be accorded great importance. In the conference of the chief ministers, it was discussed that irrigation be given priority. They had emphatically demanded that for this, money be arranged and given to them at the earliest beside the

fixed amount in the plan for giving priority to means of irrigation. I had reassured them that I would take the matter to the Finance Minister and try to make available funds for irrigation, this can be implemented in a few days. It will not be entirely correct to say that twenty years ago Orissa did not have any knowledge of taichung paddy but this year, it is growing that in some lakhs hectares of land. Therefore, to say that farming has not advanced, would be to ignore truth. We have progressed..."[28].

In the House, on 10 August 1967, Babu Jagjivan Ram spoke thus on the food crisis in the country,"... It is good that after discussing the budget for more than 12 hours, the House is discussing the food crisis in the country. I am aware of the concern of the House as regards the food crisis which the country is facing especially since the last two-three months. I would not like to elaborate on the issues that my collagues have already mentioned. In short, I would like to say that due to drought of two consecutive years, India has had to face quite a serious problem. So far as the supply of grain is concerned, we have made utmost efforts to buy and import the maximum possible quantity of foodgrain from friendly nations. However, the position of supply is such that it has not been possible to obtain the quantity of foodgrain that we wanted—whether wheat or barley. Beside this, there is also the question of foreign currency. Our need for foodgrain is of minimum about 10 lakh tons per month but today we are allocating to many states, seven to eight lakh tons. I am not talking of rice but am speaking of wheat and barley. In some areas, naturally, there is a shortage due to this. Another difficulty that the house should understand is that per month, only about eight lakh ton of foodgrain is received. Shortage in some areas is but natural. Selective allocation of foodgrain cannot be done consequently there are difficulties. Personally, in June, I had thought to import ten lakh ton and in this regard, I had taken certain steps so that in the month of June we can store it for certain areas which lack sufficient quantity of foodgrain, but the Suez Lake issue has pushed back all our programs and still continues to do that, to some extent. That

is why there was a shortage in June and we actually had to reduce the quantity being allocated to many states. I have taken steps so that the states can be supplied grain according to maximum allotment. There has been a shortage in two or three states. In particular, I would say about Uttar Pradesh that in June and also July, the shortage has been there but in this matter Uttar Pradesh government has coped very well. Fortunately, this year, the *Rabi* crop was quite good in Uttar Pradesh, particularly western Uttar Pradesh and due to excess wheat crop Uttar Pradesh government has made good arrangements to fulfill the need of foodgrain in the state. There was a shortage in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan too and I have taken such steps that to offset the shortage of the last month too in these states, during the intial fortnight of the month of August, fixed quantity of foodgrain be sent there."[29]

Answering Shri Jyotirmay Basu, Babu Jagjivan Ram said, "I do not have safe stores to make optional arrangements and science has not progressed to the extent of preventing rains. Therefore we have taken steps that the set work be accomplished by the coming month. Shri Gupta had raised a question about the open coaches of the goods trains. The House had been informed that we lack rail-coaches—covered rail coaches. Therefore sometimes, we have to take the risk of using open rail coaches. I know for a fact that the railway department is not using these to transport iron, steel or other things. Actually the rail department has a grievance that for transporting foodgrains, it has to arrange a large number of empty rail-coaches. As far as possible, our attempt is that only covered rail-coaches be used to transport foodgrains. However, the quantity of foodgrains and the speed with which we want to transport it poses problems. This is why some open rail-coaches have to be used, even during the monsoon season. If it rains, the grain get wet... The Food Corporation of India has not made such progress as it should necessarily have because in the perspective of shortage, not each state has allowed the Corporation to work openly. However wherever the state governments have authorised the Food Corporation of India, it is functioning well and it is satisfying that a large number of state governments are inviting

the Food Corporation to work there. Some honourable members have raised the question of Andhra Pradesh government, relating to finance and they have said that they do not have sufficient funds therefore they are not in a position to procure foodgrains. I want to reassure the House that the Food Corporation of India will provide the finances for whatever quantity Andhra Pradesh purchases.

The procurement work of the Food Corporation has never been affected by lack of funds. Wherever the Food Corporation's services are taken, it will make arrangements. This is about procurement, not distribution. The distribution system is the responsibility of the concerned state government. Where procurement is concerned, if the Food Corporation of India is authorised then it would work in Madras too, the state about which Shri Nambiar had made a remark... question was raised about excess production. The final solution of our food crisis depends upon excess production only and towards this end, steps have been taken. Honourable ministers have asked about fertiliser and irrigation in some areas. As you know, we have prepared a package for each state of more fertile seeds for beneficial progress and it has been arranged that the concerned states be also provided adequate chemical fertiliser, other essential materials and loans. The Secretary of Agriculture Department is visiting each state and holding discussions with the officials of the concerned state governments to make arrangements for making available the required material so that the program that we have prepared for them, can be implemented... a general question was raised about the regional arrangements. This question was also raised in the conference of the chief ministers and there almost all were of the opinion that the prevalent system be continued for now. In the perspective of the shortage of foodgrain in the country, it would be dangerous and risky to leave the transportation of foodgrain in the hands of private traders... I am glad that in this changed political perspective of the country, my experience of last three-four months has been that congress as well as non-congress governments have extended full and hearty cooperation to solve the food problem."[30]

On 06 December 1967, Babu Jagjivan Ram gave another statement in the House on the food situation in Inida. He said: “the House has discussed the food problem in the country and many honourable members have participated in the debate. The debate has been very beneficial. I am glad that the honourable members have devoted more time to the aspect of production for the development of agriculture. This is a matter of pleasure.... We shall need to continue our efforts to achieve the targets that we have set for self-sufficiency. However, the country should definitely thank itself that the impending crisis was fended off. Two consecutive years of less monsoon rains in many states and large-scale famine in several areas of the country had created a situation where not only our countrymen but those who had come from outside observed that the country's condition was such that there could be a major crisis but we overcame it. On this occasion first of all, I want to thank the people of the affected areas for their high standards of patience, tolerance and ethics. It was their hard labour that has been of assistance in successfully combating the situation. The state governments, the Union government and to a large extent the voluntary organisations in the country and those from outside have contributed much in dealing with the situation. I cannot claim that we have been able to make available the desired quantity of foodgrain to the people but now we can definitely claim that we have certainly been successful in giving enough quantity of food to the people as to prevent hunger deaths. This in itself is no small achievement for any country and a valid claim can be made that we have overcome a major crisis. In several states, during drought, people had laboriously taken steps for looking after the means of irrigation, construction of wells and increase in the number of water-pumps. This also contributed in increasing production. However we should not become complacent at this and our efforts should continue despite good rains this year.”[31]

About the ways of governmental purchase of foodgrain, Babu Jagjivan Ram said, “this year, the monsoons have been kind to us. This year, the possibility is of 9.2 to 9.5 million ton foodgrain being produced... We have to emphasise the need for excess procurement and it is my pleasure to inform the House that all

state governments, be they states of deficit or surplus production, have taken desirable and adequate steps for maximum purchase of foodgrain in their areas. Where the question of the process for governmental purchase is concerned then as I have told the House on several occasions in the past, it is upto the state governments to adopt the best way as they find suitable and so it has been done. Some states have monopoly of purchase, some have production tax and some tax the traders and the mill-owners. However there is reasonable hope that the targets set would be achieved in many states."[32]

About price-fixation Babu Jagjivan Ram said, "I can say for sure that the state governments pay attention to the farmers' interests in their states. No government can afford to keep a large section of the society deprived of well-being and that too, that part of society which is the mainstay of economy. Therefore it is my opinion that the purchase-price that we have set for many states are totally justified and designed to promote the farmers... Agricultural Prices Commission pays attention to the price situation in the whole country but each state thinks of it with reference to its own self. That is why I had said that we certainly do not accept without analysis or amendments the suggestions given. Yet wherever we have not accepted the state governments demand to raise the price it is only so because it would change the pattern of prices, not only in that state but the whole country."[33]

Responding to a question by Shri Devraj Patil, Babu Jagjivan Ram said, "In my understanding it is essential to consider the basic cost of production in fixing the price of agricultural produce. However, as in the case of industries, this is difficult more so as regards agriculture since, for lack of desirable statistical data, it cannot be said that all factors have been duly assessed. Although the variables are considered broadly but it cannot be claimed with certainty that while fixing the price of agricultural produce, the elements in cost of production all have been kept in mind as I have tried to convey. However, I definitely say that the prices fixed are reasonable and fair. In such a sittuation, both the farmer and the consumer have to compromise as regards profits. While

doing so, you should not forget that a large percentage of the producers are themselves consumers too. We always tend to forget this aspect."[34]

Responding to a question by Shri S.M. Banerjee, the Food Minister stated, "it is a common belief that the Indian farmers are orthodox, ordinarily they do not adopt new ways and techniques of agriculture. Our farmers have proved this assumption wrong, by immediately and enthusiastically adopting the new techniques. They have immediately adopted several types of more fertile seeds, fertilisers and pesticide–sprays. This is a matter of enthusiasm. Till now, agriculture has only been the means of subsistence. It has been adequately profitable for agriculture, to adopt new ways, use science and technology and promote the tendency in the scientists as regards the procedure of continous research in the field of agriculture, and this is the only way through which we will become self-sufficient in the matter of food."[35]

Babu Jagjivan Ram concluded with reassuring the House, that "Food is a national issue. We shall all have to come together, to attempt a solution to this problem so that in the near future, we can put an end to importation and become self-sufficient in the matter of food."[36]

As a result of the 'green revolution' the area of cultivating fertile seeds increased from 18.9 lakh hectares in 1966-67 to 60.7 lakh hectares in 1967-68 and further to 93 lakh hectares in 1968-69. In 1969-70, this radius covered 109 lakh hectares. The production of foodgrain increased by 28.2 per cent in 1967-68 and total production was 951 lakh ton. In 1968-69, it was confirmed on authority that there has come about a revolution in area of wheat production since despite intemperate weather, the production of wheat increased in 1965-66 to 187 lakh ton from the annual average of the last five years of 110 lakh ton. During 1969-70 and 1970-71, the food-crop in India was excellent. Consequently, the production of grain also far exceeded the total demand in the country.[37]

As a result of the 'green revolution', the dependence of the country grew less on the import of foodgrain. During 1970-71, Babu Jagjivan Ram had firmly decided against importing grain from America under P.L-480 agreement. A second reason for his decision was that under this agreement, from 1971, the country had to pay for the imported food in dollars (foreign currency) only. Therefore, Babu Jagjivan Ram exhorted that India should become self-sufficient in foodgrain by 1970-71. This became possible due to his foresight, deep wisdom, political maturity and his extra-ordinary administrative leadership. The credit for making the country self-sufficient through the green revolution goes to his efforts as the Agriculture, Food, Community Development and the Cooperatives Minister of the country.

Babu Jagjivan Ram remained the country's Agriculture, Food, Community Development and Cooperatives Minister till 28 June 1970. Giving proof of his unmatched skills during more than four years, as the country's Defence Minister, he was again appointed as the Agriculture, Food and Irrigation Minister on October 11 1974. He undertook several measures through this ministry's Agriculture, Food and Irrigation departments for the all round development of the country. Full consideration was given to the matter that the country remain self-sufficient in the field of food production.

At a meeting in Delhi, emphasising the need for self-sufficiency in food matters, Babu Jagjivan Ram observed, "The correct and fair distribution of land, water conservation and its timely use for farming are the most significant links of our agricultural system, to strengthen and maintain it is our primary duty. That foodgrain should not rot and not one water droplet be wasted, should not only be our motto but also our aim and duty. This situation will make us self-sufficient in the matter of foodgrain."[38]

On 29 June 1970, Babu Jagjivan Ram was appointed as the Defence Minister of the country. This ministry also had a challenging jurisdiction. The mainstay of our foreign policy are to maintain amiable relations with the neighbouring countries and promote amity and fraternity with other countries of the world.

It is necessary for the Defence Minister to give a concrete shape to this policy and on the other hand, it is also quite necessary for the freedom and integrity of the country to keep its boundaries safe from external attacks.

During Babu Jagjivan Ram's stint as the Defence Minister, an event in the neighbouring country Pakistan posed grave risk to the security of India's internal and outer borders. Not only this but the people of then East Pakistan, as a result of the cruel and barbaric atrocities by the military regime of West Pakistan sought refuge in India.

Pakistan's military ruler, on 07 December 1970, held general elections in the country in which in East Pakistan out of 169 seats, 167 seats were won by then East Pakistan's Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rehman's Awami League. In West Pakistan, Pakistan People's Party got 81 seats and 44 seats went to the different political parties there and the independent candidates secured 16 seats. On the basis of landslide majority, Sheikh Mujib was to be appointed as the Prime Minister. He chose to proclaim himself in favour of autonomy in East Pakistan because as he saw it, the success that he had gained in the elections was possible as a result of the 6-point program of which the autonomy of East Pakistan was also one. Why would the military rulers of west Pakistan concede to this demand? For a compromise, Yahya Khan reached East Pakistan on 15 March 1971 to consult with Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rehman but no agreement could be reached. Then West Pakistan's army, from the night of 25-26 March 1971 began attacking cruelly and viciously, the people of East Pakistan putting thousands to death.

East Pakistan was terrorised by this brutal and vicious attack by West Pakistan. A large number of people fled to save their lives seeking refuge in India. All of a sudden, the number of refugees in our country grew to approximately one crore. This adversely affected not only the economic balance but the social structure as well. To prevent this, a request was made to Pakistan to take immediate action to solve the problem of the refugees. The rulers

in Pakistan did not even respond to this. They began threatening the peace-loving India with war. Pakistan also began positioning its army on the east and west borders of our country. Therefore while the country was staggering with the problem of looking after lakhs of refugees, Pakistan's threat to impose war upon India grew very real.

On 09 August 1971, in Delhi a twenty-years treaty was signed between India and the then Soviet Union, under section 9 of which, it was mentioned that "either of our countries, will not assist in any way, any third country that attacks either of us. In such a condition when either of our countries are attacked, or threatened with an attack then both countries shall immediately confer, to counter such a threat and will take such suitable and effective measures as to preserve peace and security in both the nations."[39]

East Pakistan, in line with the aspirations of the people there, had come to be recognised as Bangladesh in the world. While the people there were suffering the cruel and barbaric attack by West Pakistan for the freedom of their country, the military regime in West Pakistan posted soldiers on the east and west borders of India and bombarded about 43 times, the people living in villages along the border. Pakistani's airforce launched air attacks on the civil areas along the borders. Despite all this, the Government of India practised restraint.

Shri S.M. Banerjee gave a call-attention notice in the Parliament on 15 November 1971, about the firing by Pakistan's army on Indian areas and the violation of Indian airspace by Pakistan's airforce. In response, Babu Jagjivan Ram gave a statement in the house—

"The tense situation along our borders with Pakistan is due to conflict between the military regime there and the people of Bangladesh. The House has knowledge of the terrible attack on 25-26 March 1971 by Pakistan soldiers upon Bangladesh. In the elections held after a decade, the people of Bangladesh have reposed their faith in the Awami League and supported its six point programme. Instead of respecting the poll verdict, Pakistan's

military rulers have violently attacked the people of Bangladesh. A deadly attack like that on the night of 25-26 March has not been heard of or seen before. A lot of atrocities have been committed, thousands have been put to death, women have been dishonoured and children handicapped. Dhaka University was the main target of this attack. Armed soldiers have surrounded and killed intelligentsia, youths and minorities. Modern weapons have been used including tanks, armoured vehicles, bombing squads and aircraft. The sympathy of the House towards the people affected by this crackdown has already been expressed. Such an unnatural terrorstrike has forced the men, women, children, Muslims, Hindus, Christians and Buddhists of Bangladesh to flee and reach India in a continuous stream of refugees. The terror has only increased as has the number of refugees. They number about a crore now. The cruel attempt by Pakistan, to suppress and eliminate the culture and identity of the people of Bangladesh has shaken the world consciousness. As far as we are concerned. the situation arising from the continuing forcible evacuation of lakhs of helpless men and women, of all ages and religions, is like a fresh attack. Instead of ignoring it, we have provided them shelter and assistance in this crisis. Their continuous stay in our country has put us under tremendous pressure. Our economy is shaken. It has increased our social, economic and political tensions. It is our desire that these refugees, free of fear, may return to their homes with respect, dignity and security.

During the last several months, the military regime, behind a show of bravado and deceit, to turn the world's attention away from its misdemeanours and mistakes has been putting the blame on India. We are guilty only of helping out of sympathy, people in the grip of a terrible calamity. The President of Pakistan threatens that if the *Mukti-Bahini* (Liberation-Army) frees its land from the occupation of the Pakistan soldiers who are raping and looting in Bangladesh, then he will take revenge for this from us. On 30 July 1971, President Yahya Khan had threatened us with war. He repeated this threat on 12 October 1971, during his address to the Nation. Meanwhile Pakistan has been increasing its weapon-power. A propaganda campaign to ‘crush India’ and

'gain victory over India' has been launched. '*Jihad*' is being threatened against us.

For actualising the threat of war against India, Yahya Khan has ordered the military regiments to reach West Pakistan border in large numbers. Pakistan has sent army contingents near our borders in Rajasthan, Gujarat and Punjab. The ceasefire line mentioned under the Karachi Agreement has been constantly violated. The number of battalions in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir has been increased, the *Mujahideen* have been activated in large numbers and an additional branch of Karakoram Scouts has been organised. On the western border along the cease-fire line, a huge cache of defence–material and explosives has been piled up. By mid-October, Pakistan had effectively deployed its armed froces along our borders. Since then, Pakistani army has engaged in a systematic provocative propaganda. Our land and air space has been violated many times. Our eastern borders have been heavily bombarded by Pakistani soldiers leading to heavy losses in property, people have been killed, our citizens and even the refugees on our land have been severely injured. The cease-fire line has been violated. Attempts have been made to harm our communication system on the eastern border.

I do not want to exaggerate but the situation on our borders is actually quite serious. Pakistan soldiers have the advantage of proximity to the border. Their weapon and military forces are in a state of full readiness for attack. Information received shows us that air-combat is the first part of their plan. Under such circumstances, we have no other option but to deploy our military contingents on the western border. Today, our security forces have taken up positions along our eastern and western borders, in a state of full readiness to counter any sudden moves. The morale of our soldiers is high. There is adequate moral fervour among the people in the border districts. Suitable steps have been taken for our defence. We are ready to defeat any attack on our borders and if the need arises, the war is to be carried over into the enemy territory."[40]

Replying to Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee's questions, Babu Jagjivan Ram stated in the house. “Shri Vajpayee had raised the question of violation of our airspace by aircraft. He must have read in the newspapers as to how, upon Pakistan’s intrusion, our anti-aircraft canons were fired. I had stated in the other House and want to repeat here that it is our clear order that if any Pakistani aircraft arrives here, it is to be shot down. I have myself admitted that there have been transgressions at our borders. I have also said that to send one crore refugees into our country is in itself a mischievous attack. I have also informed that if we are exercising restraint in the face of provocation, it is so because we do not wish to rush into a situation that could escalate into a war. I have said and wish to reiterate firmly that if a single soldier from Pakistan comes near our side then our soldiers will push him back across the border. However, I do not want to react to Pakistan’s provocations. Our purpose is clear, the objective is clear and in this matter, the decision is also clear. As it is, even if one aircraft of Pakistan comes to this side, we can call it invasion and can attack, if even a single shot is fired near our boders, we can call that too an attack, and we have also said so but the line we are taking is that if Pakistan’s soldiers venture near our borders then our soldiers will beat them back. I wish to state with conviction that there is nothing uncertain about this. We are not working in a state of indecision but acting in accordance with a firm decision. It is also our firm belief that the people who have been forced to quit Bangladesh shall have to return home. They can only go back when they believe that they can do so safely with dignity. I have already spoken clearly as to when such a situation can come about. The political solution of Bangladesh can only be the one that is acceptable to the elected representatives there. What would be acceptable to them, they have expressed in no uncertain terms and I hope that Shri Vajpayee has read that too. They have stated clearly that any political solution less than total independence would not be acceptable to them. They have also reiterated their demand for secular, democratic administration in Bangladesh. The elected representatives of Bangladesh have taken this decision...

Shri Vajpayee has mentioned that re-elections are being conducted there by Pakistan's soldiers. This is not something new to world history. When some military administration starts losing authority, when it realises that its power is being eroded then it does not hesitate to use such sham tactics. Examples are there in world history that in such conditions, puppet cabinets are constituted. However, the world history is also witness to the fate of such puppet cabinets and leaders. I have no doubt that as history has recorded the fate of such puppet cabinets and prime ministers, the attempt of Pakistan's soldiers in Bangladesh would head towards the same fate. I also have no doubt that the youths of Bangladesh who have witnessed the humiliation of their mothers and sisters, witnessed the brutal murder of their near relatives, will never be able to forget that there is no other way but to free Bangladesh. This is all that I have to say to the house. I do not see the necessity for saying any more."[41]

On 03 December 1971, Pakistan attacked India where promptly Emergency was declared. The same day addressing the nation through All India Radio, Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi said, "the attack shall have to be countered. People of India will be extremely patient in replying to this." The next day, on 04 December 1971, giving a statement in the Lok Sabha, she said, "this morning, I have come to know from the newspapers that the West Pakistan government has declared war against us... I hope that in the difficult days ahead, complete unity will be visible in all our actions."[42]

On 04 December 1971, at 5.40 p.m., Babu Jagjivan Ram gave a statement in the House about Pakistan's attack, "you know that Pakistan has imposed war on us. Pakistan's airforce began a pre-emptive air-strikes on our airfields, from 5.45 p.m. yesterday. Pakistan's planes have attacked 12 of our air field and air-bases. These are—Amritsar, Pathankot, Srinagar, Faridkot, Halwara, Ambala, Agra, Uttarlai, Jodhpur, Jamnagar, Sirsa and Sarwala. The railway cantonments of Godara Road, Jammu and Barmer were also attacked. Four of the enemy planes were shot down. Our runways have suffered some damage, none of our planes have been damaged. One area has been harmed, in a minor way. All

our airfields are completely intact. Pakistan's intention of causing more damage by attacking first, has been defeated".

In its counter-attack, the Indian Air Force, 11.50 p.m., attacked Pakistan's airforce bases of Chanderi, Shorkot, Sargodha, Muri, Miyanwali, Masroor (Karachi), Risalwalla (Rawalpindi) and Changa Manga (Lahore). The Army has got even better results than this. Numerous aircraft of Pakistan have been shot down. Sargodha airbase has been damaged. The Badin radar station, (Kutch) has been damaged. All our planes except for one Hunter, one H.F-24 and one Sukhoi have returned safely.

Since 6 p.m. Pakistan's army has been firing at our soldiers in Poonch, Chhamb, Jaurian, Amritsar, Fazilka's and Pathankot. Our forces have beaten them back.

In the morning of 04 December, our army has secured five posts of Pakistan in Tithwal. A hill feature between Uri and Hajipur has also been taken control of. Our army has caught 13 soldiers and one Junior Commissioned Officer of Pakistan. With a large arsenal, Pakistan's contingents have engaged us in battle at a distance of 30 miles from west of 30 miles from Akhnoor. In this battle, we have killed several of their soldiers and destroyed six enemy tanks. In Firozpur area, a brigade of Pakistan's army division...also assisted by their airforce, is attacking our army divisions positioned in Hussainiwalla and Firozpur. Our infantry, retaliating to the enemy attack have pushed them back. We have also suffered damages and have lost some land. Hussainiwalla bridge has been damaged.

The Indian army has entered Bangladesh and is working with the *Mukti-Bahini*. Together, our infantry divisions along with the *Mukti-sena* has occupied Tripura and Kochar airbases near Shamsher Nagar. Fierce fighting continues around Akhaura. At Komilla our army has emerged victorious in Saigan and Majlispur. Thakurpur, Darsana and Ghazipur are now under our control. In Phulbari, 42 soldiers of Pakistan, including one JCO and one Havildar Major of '24-Frontier Force Rifle Battalion' have been caught.

Indian Air Force has attacked Pakistan's airbases in Bangladesh. Till now, 8 Saber Jets of Pakistan have been shot down. Two Hunters of ours have been destroyed.

Now, the Indian Navy's east and west fleet is attempting to destroy enemy ships and not let West Pakistan take over the sea-communications system between West Pakistan and Bangladesh. This morning, our ships have captured one of Pakistan's ships. A navy division is aboard this ship now with orders to take it to the nearest harbour. East fleet has attacked Cox's Bazar. The attack has destroyed air bases. The Indian Navy has blockaded supplies to Pakistan ships. Pakistan's ships are stranded in Bangladesh."[43]

On 07 December 1971, Babu Jagjivan Ram gave another statement in the House on the latest situation of war. Some of its excerpts are given thus:

"Till now we have claimed fifty-two fighter planes of Pakistan and damaged probably four more. Four Pakistani pilots are in our custody. In Poonch, Pakistan's continuous attacks have been countered with heavy damages. Chhamb sector has been under heavy pressure. We have positioned our army divisions back at Munnawar Tawi river. Before this, in the battle, 25 tanks of Pakistan have been destroyed and the enemy killed in a large number. We are exerting pressure in Akhnoor and Shakargarh areas. Pakistan's soldiers have been repelled from the Dera Baba Nanak area. The bridge head on river Ravi, is under our control now. The attempt of Pakistan's army to infiltrate beyond the line of control has been foiled. In Amritsar area, some of Pakistan's outposts are in our control now. In the Firozpur area, Pakistan's army has been repulsed from Serja. An armoured contingent of Pakistan tried to infiltrate in the area near Ramgarh in Rajasthan. It was caught in Longewala and about a tenth part of it destroyed. 20 tanks have been totally destroyed and 7 heavily damaged. In Sindh, we have been successful in entering from two sides. Our divisions are advancing through several areas. We have also occupied Islamgarh. Till now, our military forces have been successful in destroying 96 tanks of Pakistan.

In the east zone, our divisions are working with *Mukti-Bahini*, Pakistan's infantry is retreating in the face of our pressure. This

morning, we had wrested away Jessore air base. West Kaliganj has been cleansed of Pakistan's military presence. From Meherpur's important highway, the water-route to Gwaladoghat through Jhenida has been cut off. In Dinajpur's hilly areas, our divisions are advancing towards the Rangpur Bogra road. Lalmanir Hat has been occupied along with its airbase. Kurigram, Rangpur and east Dinajpur is now independent. The honourable members must be aware of the occupation of Akhaora two days back. Our forces have surrounded from all sides the important strategic areas of Maulvi Bazar and Brahmanbaria. Feni was freed yesterday of Pakistan's military divisions. The advance contingent of our forces are advancing speedily to disembark at Chandpur Ghat. Pakistan's airforce has been totally wiped out in Bangladesh. Our airforce is in full control of the area. Chatgaon, Chalna, Mangla and Khulna – the areas from where enemy attacks could be launched from the sea, have been surrounded from all sides. Sea communication system between West Pakistan and Pakistan's contingent in Bangladesh has been completely destroyed. The honourable members do have knowledge of the Indian Navy's courageous actions on the night of 04-05 December. Two Pakistan's ships were sunk and one was severely damaged. Our navy has entered within the 15 miles area from the Karachi port. Its bombardment has caused much damage to the important locations of the port and oil-reserves. In the Bay of Bengal, Indian Navy was successful in destroying one submarine of Pakistan. East fleet is now involved in the destruction of Pakistan's fleet of ships in control of Bangladesh coast.

Under a joint plan, the Army, Air Force and Navy are fighting unitedly. The tasks, to carry out the strategic plans, and the assistance provided by one wing of the forces to the other affords satisfaction... On behalf of the members, I would like to convey the House's congratulations to the three forces of our military for their acts of bravery undertaken for the security of the nation and to defeat the enemy."[44]

War was raging. On 14 December 1971, Babu Jagjivan Ram gave the following statement in the house —

"Today is the eleventh day of the war imposed by Pakistan upon us. The enemy has failed completely in its objectives of attack. Pakistan's army has suffered heavy damages.

In Kargil and Tithwal areas, many enemy posts have been seized. As a result, it is certain that the enemy cannot harm our road-transport system in this area. In Uri, Poonch, Rajouri and Naushera areas, enemy attempts to infiltrate our borders have been foiled and the pressure of Pakistan's military forces positioned around the ceasefire line has given way. Several attacks have been launched on the enemy bases. Some of them have been occupied. Now our strategic position is more stable and effective.

The House has knowledge of the events in Chhamb sector. The enemy had once advanced along the east side of Munnawar Tawi river but was driven away. The enemy is still present on the west side of Munnawar Tawi. Its continuous efforts to quietly infiltrate along the east have been foiled. Surrounding the east coast of the river from below, our armed forces are well spread out on all sides and keeping its west coast under pressure, are capable of surveillance. In the Samba-Pathankot area, our strategic location is adequately strong and now our vast road transport system is more secure at the rear.

In Punjab area, the enemy has continuously made efforts to infiltrate but our position of defence is more stable now. This area has been quiet for a while now. The honourable members have knowledge of the planned enemy attacks in Ramgarh area of Jaisalmer. This enemy attempt was foiled, with much damage inflicted to it. The enemy has been ousted and now we have advanced a few miles inside its border. Further, in the South Barmer area, fierce fighting is on, for Naya Chor. Strengthening its position again, the enemy is engaging in stiff battle. I can inform the House that the immediate danger, on the Rajasthan border is over.

In the Kutch area, our armed forces have occupied the strategically significant Viravah and Nagar Paarkar area is also under our control. About a thousand kilometers of land in Sindh province is under the control of our armed forces. Arrangements

have been made for the security of citizens in the area under occupation.

Now I will talk about the situation on the eastern border. With the cooperation of *Mukti-Bahini*, our armed forces have been successful in setting free, a large area of Bangladesh. Both have now launched a joint attack on the cities of Noahkhali, Laksham, Chandpur, Feini, Komilla, Gaiband, Sylhet, Mymensingh, Jamalpur, Kushtia, Jessore and Hilli. Some of Pakistan's troops now want to surrender.

Desperate to force us away, the enemy is seeking to stop our advance by destroying the bridges along our path and damaging the assistance posts established along the river's coast. *Mukti-Bahini* and Bangladesh freedom fighters are helping our forces to cross the river by boats. We have used helicopters to transport our army contingents to the rear of the enemy posts. In north Dhaka, infantry divisions have been transported by planes and they have established contact with the *Mukti-Bahini* and our army.

From different directions, our contingents are reaching Dhaka now. Several areas of Dhaka are within the strike-distance of our military weapons. Two messages from our Army Chief General Maneckshaw to Pakistan's army in Dhaka have gone unanswered. Yesterday, we have sent a message to the army chief of Dhaka area, General Farmaan Ali that it is the obligation of all concerned people, to prevent the massacre of innocent. The commanders of the army under siege have been asked to cooperate so that the concerned people can carry out this responsibility to the full. He has reiterated that if in Dhaka, pockets of soldiers decide to continue resistance then all the people and foreigners shall be transported to a safe area from the areas of conflict. I do believe that heed will be paid to General Maneckshaw's advice sooner than !ater and in Dhaka, discretion will prevail. In the area of conflict, we have always realised deeply our obligations towards the public. Bangladesh has also agreed that the common masses including those also who live outside Bangladesh should be protected at all costs.... For people to be evacuated safely, our airforce did not attack the airfields near these cities, during the

pre-informed time-schedule. Similarly, the Indian Navy coordinated the activities so that the neutral ships can be given permission to leave Pakistan and the boundaries of Pakistan's ports. The United Nations and many foreign governments too, have appreciated the extra-ordinary efforts made by our security forces in this regard. During this temporary halt to our air and naval activities, the enemy has transported imported warfare material to its bases and laid mines inside water, around the ports.

Pakistan's airforce has launched air attacks with the aim of destroying our air fields that our military bases and runways be unable to render service. It will afford the House some satisfaction to hear that they succeeded only in shooting down one plane, and all our airfields, except for quite a short span of time, have always been in fine condition. On the other hand, our retaliatory activities have caused heavy damage to Pakistan's signal, runway and military bases. Consequently, the enemy attacks during daylight are very few or negligible now. The night-time enemy activities continue although sluggishly. Pakistan's airforce is rendering important assistance to Pakistan's army in some areas. The Indian Air Force is seeking to demolish Pakistan's airfields and scatter its army. The assistance by our airforce has been very beneficial in enabling our army to advance immediately into Bangladesh and foil the Pakistan army's plots on the western borders. There is less bombardment now. It is possible that now they are deliberately attacking the citizens as targets. Three days earlier, they had bombarded three villages near Jalandhar in which about a hundred civilians were killed. A government hospital in Jaurian was also attacked. Pakistan's airforce also attacked some civil areas in Srinagar. Our airforce has consistently attacked only the battle-areas sparing the civil ones. Now the House knows the truth about the attack by Pakistan's plane on an orphanage in Dhaka. Yet the destruction of this orphanage is being blamed on us. The House has knowledge of the heroic feats of the Indian Navy that pushed into the Karachi port and succeeded in bombarding Pakistan's naval bases, from Gwadar to Karachi. Consequently, a portion of Pakistan's naval fleet has been

destroyed, the sea links between west Pakistan and Bangladesh snapped off and the supply to Pakistan's ships blockaded on the sea route between Karachi and Bangladesh. Beside this, the navy is using its power of control, wisely and flexibly, in the import-export of foreign commodities. We have taken control of many of Pakistan's ships and also several goods-laden ships. Some neutral ships had experienced intial difficulties from our checks on the import-export of goods. They have been pacified. The neutral ships have been provided full opportunities to leave the areas of conflict. Pakistan's navy has been unable to tamper with our trading-ships. Our ports are absolutely fine. In all these naval activities, we have lost just one ship.

The House would naturally be desirous of receiving full information about the intense battle of the last ten days. I have full information of the happenings till six p.m. last evening. The details of damages to Indian military forces are thus:

Martyred soldiers	:	1,978
Injured soldiers	:	5,025
Missing soldiers	:	1,662

The number of the dead and injured, in Pakistan's military forces is much more. Frankly, I do not have their correct statistics. I know this much that until now, of Pakistan's organised military forces, 4,102 officers and soldiers and 4,066 officers and soldiers of their additional fighting forces are in our custody. Till now, we have an account of 175 tanks of Pakistan that have been destroyed and 18 tanks, intact, are in our custody. 61 tanks of ours have been damaged. Nine airmen of the Indian airforce and three of our navy-men have lost their lives. 36 airmen and 03 sailors are missing. We have lost 14 planes. We do not have the data of Pakistan's dead and injured airmen and sailors. Pakistan's airforce has lost 83 planes. Pakistan's navy has suffered heavy damages including two destroyers, two mine-destroyers, two submarines, 16 gunboats and 12 other ships. We do not have information about the dead and injured sailors of Pakistan's navy. The House knows that we have lost a battleship. From I.N.S. Khukhri, 18 officers and 173 sailors are still missing. Six officers and 91 sailors have been rescued.

I believe that the House would wish to convey its deep sympathies to the dependents of all those courageous officers and soldiers who sacrificed their lives in the defence of our motherland. The House, with me, would also like to express deep gratitude towards the soldiers for the fact that a major part of the battle was fought on the enemy territory. The enemy has been kept at a safe distance from our western borders and heavy damage has been caused to enemy's armed forces and sophisticated weapons of warfare.

It is necessary to praise Bangladesh's *Mukti-Bahini* as well. Their well-organised army is unitedly fighting with our forces. The sacrifices, indomitable will-power and initiative of the freedom fighters there, created such circumstances that Pakistan's army forcibly occupying the land was compelled to withdraw. It is our hope that the joint front of Bangladesh and the Indian army would soon complete the task of securing independence for Bangladesh."[45]

Babu Jagjivan Ram gave this third statement in the house:

"This is my third statement about the war imposed on us by Pakistan. I am in a position to tell the House that Pakistan has not been successful in achievement of its objectives, even to the minimum extent, when under a pre-determined plan, on the evening of 03 December, it attacked our airforce bases and army. That evening, Pakistan turned its attack on Bangladesh into a full war upon India. Our army.... contacted *Mukti-Bahini* and now both are not only cooperating but are working unitedly, under the same command. The house does have full knowledge of the victory over Jessore, Sylhet and Komilla. Dinajpur and Rangpur are about to fall. Pakistan's army, in a state of deep unrest, disarray and fear, is abandoning its strong holds. Now, the remaining soilders have been ordered to collect at Barisal in West and Narayanganj in East. Our army is spread across the areas of the rivers Padma, Brahmaputra and Meghna. Our military-chiefs have already warned Pakistan's soldiers to surrender before our army as their land, air and sea escape-routes have been blocked. Our east airforce command has almost annihilated Pakistan's airforce in Bangladesh.

Our east fleet of ships has blocked all sea-routes of Bangladesh. The people of Bangladesh are breathing freely and enthusiastically greeting and extending hospitality to our troops.

Till now, our purpose has been to prevent battle on our sacred land in Jammu-Kashmir and Punjab as well as defend ourselves from the dangers arising from Pakistan's military-posts. In Poonch the enemy has made constant efforts to advance but has been rebuffed. On the other hand, our army divisions have taken control of four significant out posts in Kargil. The enemy is constantly bombarding our posts in Uri and Nangahar. Attempts of Pakistan infiltration from the rear have been foiled. Pakistan had launched a major attack on our posts in Chhamb sector. I have already informed the House that despite difficulties, our infantry courageously stayed put for 72 hours, on Munnawar Tawi river. Day before yesterday, they were called back to the east of the river to our main defence area. Pakistan's fresh attack on our army has been foiled, and its army has been ousted from Akhnoor. We are continuing our attacks around the borders of Samba area and Shakargarh while Punjab has been quiet for the last 48 hours.

The honourable members know that a tenth of Pakistan's division around Ramgarh in Jaisalmer has been finished off. The remainder is being wiped out now. In Barmer area, our military contingents have advanced further. Naya Chor has been attacked from two sides. Our military divisions are in constant communication with the security forces positioned at Naya Chor. From Gadra road, the army engineers have laid a six-miles long rail track to connect both rail lines from India to Pakistan. A narrow gauge train now transports the essential supplies from Barmer to our army divisions posted ahead.

The fighting is intense but even now, the big tanks have not been included in it. Still, 109 tanks of Pakistan have been destroyed and 9 in good condition have been captured. A large quantity of arsenal from the enemy side has also fallen in our hands. Till now, only 49 tanks of ours have been destroyed. After my last statement, on 07 December, I have been informed that Pakistan's largest

submarine, America-manufactured 'Ghazi' was sunk on the night of December 03-04 near Vishakhapatnam. Till now Pakistan has lost 3 battle-ships, 9 gunboats and 2 submarines.

Now I will discuss the aerial-warfare. For the last two days. Pakistani airforce is afraid of attacking our airfields and targets in daylight. Only at night, have they attacked in a haste causing only negligible damage.

Our aircraft are continuing the attacks on the enemy in both west and east areas – air-bases, targets, cantonments, soldiers camps and communications systems. Our attacks have caused much damage to Pakistan's air-bases and destroyed several enemy tanks. Pakistan's airforce has lost 73 planes till now. We have suffered a loss of 31 planes.

Pakistan's military forces have the tendency not to bombard the battle-grounds while our defence forces have strict orders that they should focus their attention on battle-grounds as targets and spare the citizens any harm.

I believe that the House joins me in congratulating, on behalf of the people of India, our soldiers, for their courageous feats."[46]

After a battle that continued for 14 days between Pakistan and India, on Bangladesh territory, under the leadership of Pakistan's Lieutenant - General A.A.K. Niazi, approximately one lakh soldiers surrendered before the Indian army. Ultimately Pakistan was defeated. India emerged victorious in this war. Consequently, in East Pakistan, according to the aspirations of the people there, a free nation of Bangladesh emerged on the international secne. Much credit for making India victorious in this decisive war goes to Babu Jagjivan Ram as its defence minister.

Replying to a question on Pakistan's violations of the cease-fire, Babu Jagjivan Ram said, "After the declaration of cease-fire between India and Pakistan, on 17 December, 1971, at 7 PM in the evening, some border skirmishes and several violations at the actual line of control have been reported. These controversies and differences have been settled to a large extent by the local

commanders. Particularly in Jammu Kashmir there have been several violations and a number of infiltrations by Pakistan. In Kashmir south-east Tithwal Kaiyan, the attack on 05 May, by Pakistan's division is the largest of the infiltration attempt till date. During the 14 days war, our divisions had taken control of Kaiyan area of radius 13.2 square miles, in Leepa Valley at Tithwal. Around the actual line of control in this area, sometimes, Pakistan's army fires at our posts and our army retaliates."

"At 3 p.m. on 05 May 1972, one of our posts in the area was suddenly attacked by several contingents of Pakistan's army. At this post located at a distance of 10 miles from south-east Tithwal, our soldiers caused great damage to the enemy and in this way, they had to withdraw from this post at 7 a.m. I inform the House with much regret that in this 20 of our soldiers lost their lives and 10 were injured. It is estimated that the number of Pakistan's dead and injured is much more. Since we did not want to aggravate the conflict therefore our Army Head Office established contact with Pakistan's Army Headquarters on 06 May 1972, asking it to cease fire... Consquently, the army offices of both the countries ordered ceasefire which became effective at 7.30 a.m on 06 May 1972. Efforts are on, for a Flag Meeting."[47]

Responding to Shri Piloo Modi's question about the violations of ceasefire, Babu Jagjivan Ram stated, ".... The issue of all these violations till now have been sorted out at the Flag Meeting of commanders. In these too we had thought that Pakistan be asked to vacate the two posts that it had occupied by force. As the House knows, Pakistan's effort is to internationalise the issue and whenever the opportunity arose, they have always demanded that international observers be called over and we have always firmly stated that since the war was bilateral and not at the signal of a third party therefore there is no need for interference by any third party including U.N."[48]

Reacting to Shri Nihar Ranjan Laskar's question relating to summit talks, Babu Jagjivan Ram replied, "... On this subcontinent, our endeavour would be to ensure permanent peace and as the

House knows, we are making all efforts to preserve peace. We wish to resolve this issue too, through Flag Meetings and we hope that Flag Meeting would soon be successful and Pakistan's local commanders would find a way to withdraw from these posts. I would not want to link this incident with the peace talks between our Prime Minister and Pakistan's President."[49]

In response to a question by Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Babu Jagjivan Ram said, "... I can only say that this is one incident of its kind. After this, our preparation would be such that if Pakistan does not want to behave well, it will be taught a lesson. I would like to repeat that we do not want to connect such an incident to the Summit talks."[50]

On the border, Pakistan's army continued to violate the cease fire at many places for some months and the Indian army retaliated accordingly. It was observed that after sometime, Pakistan began following the principles of ceasefire and thus peace was established again.

As the country's Defence Minister, while Babu Jagjivan Ram extended a hand of friendship to the enemy after its defeat, on the other hand he issued several orders to provide facilities for the dependents of the thousands of soldiers who had sacrificed their lives in this war. Main among these facilities were:

(1) The widows of commissioned officers, will get as family pension, three-fourth of the salary being received by their deceased husband until such time as he would have ordinarily continued in service, if he were alive. After this, such pension disbursed would be given, as is after completing ordinary service. In other matters, the pension amount will be equivalent to the full salary being received by the army officers and soldiers at the time when they were killed. These facilities would also be given to those parents whose unmarried young soldier sons have sacrificed their lives during the war. The amount of special gratuity, due on death of a soldier at enemy hands, was raised considerably.

(2) Arrangements will be made for the 'sheltered' appointment of such officers and soldiers as were disabled in war. Those

disabled officers and soldiers as cannot be accommodated in service will be provided 'war injury pay'. In this way, those who are disabled will be given the amount of salary as they were receiving at the time in the war.

(3) Widows, whose husbands died in battle, will be provided a free land and finances will be arranged for constructing a house on this land or renovation of the built house.

(4) The widows of soldiers and the disabled soldiers will be given employment. Free training will be arranged. Suitable assistance will be given to the widows and disabled soldiers for self-employment. The Employment offices have been ordered that they send to employers, for priority in government services, the names of two children of the deceased soldiers.

(5) The family members of the dead and the disabled soldiers will be provided medical facilities in army hospitals.

(6) The government will make full arrangements for expenditure on the education till the level of receiving first degree, for the children whose father has died or been disabled in the war.

(7) It was also decided to establish a central organisation to give a concrete shape to all the above measures.

In this way, Babu Jagjivan Ram gave a natural, simple and clear answer to each challenge by the enemy and defeated him completely. Being the Defence Minister, in a way he changed not only the history of the country but also the geography of the world.

In conclusion, a minor change of topic to a family matter — Babu Jagjivan Ram's daughter, Miera, who had earned the degrees of post-graduation in English literature and graduation in the subject of law was married to a resident of Patna Shri Gyaneshwar Prasad's son Shri Manjul Kumar, on 29 November 1968 at the Delhi residence of Babu Jagjivan Ram. On the auspicious occasion, the invitees from many corners of the country, including several politicians, bureaucrats, social workers and eminent individuals blessed the newly married couple. Shri Manjul Kumar is a person

of gentle and simple nature who seems to have inherited his simplicity from his mother, scholarly Smt. Sumitra Devi and his eloquence and deep knowledge from his father, Shri Gyaneshwar Prasad, He is a lawyer practising at the supreme court in Delhi and is a devoted social worker. They have a son, Anshul Avijit and two daughters, Swati and Devangana. Smt. Miera Kumar, after efficient and devoted service in the Indian Foreign service is now completely engrossed in social service and *dalit* welfare.

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The Last Phase

ON 26 June 1975, the President of India, Fakhruddin Ali Ahmad promulgated an ordinance declaring a State of Emergency, on the advice of the Prime Minister, Smt. Indira Gandhi. Vinoba Bhave called it a historic step taken by the government to maintain for discipline in the country. On 18 January 1977, Smt. Indira Gandhi announced the general elections in the country. It is true that in the beginning of Emergency period, many ongoing plans for national development were carried out in earnest and the centre and the state governments worked in tandem, honestly and sincerely, to provide social justice to the people. Efforts were made to maintain strict discipline on one hand while on the other hand, it was sought that the implementation of welfare schemes benefit the common man directly.

The 20 points program was implemented mainly during emergency. However, within a few months the increasing strictness of the administration frightened the people. There was a spurt in the arrest of opposition leaders and they were put behind bars indefinitely in various prisons of the country. Within a year and a half, the direct and indirect public outrage became obvious. Babu Jagjivan Ram resolutely, devotedly and determinedly continued to work for strengthening the Indian National Congress. Holding different positions in the Union Cabinet, he had served the country for nearly 42 years in its all-round development and progress and now heeding the public outcry, he met Smt. Indira Gandhi on 01 February 1977 at her residence and requested her to end the emergency immediately.

In this regard, he wrote a letter on 02 February 1977 to Smt. Gandhi. Its text is given below:

"In our meeting last evening at 4.45 p.m., while discussing the impact of emergency, I had asked you to end it as it is not justified to prolong it under the present circumstances. I also clarified that

the existing laws of the country are enough to deal with its aftermath and no extraordinary methods need to be employed.

You refused to end emergency as the Ministry of Home affairs, after a study in this regard, did not find it feasible to recommend its termination. It was useless to pursue the matter any further and I took my leave.

The country today is faced with dual emergency situation as some extraordinary laws are also being enforced. The citizens have been denied the freedom of expression and freedom to organise, etc.. They are no more free and safe. The government can deprive a citizen of his life, freedom and property without any legal remedy or administrative procedure. The Executive possesses extraordinary powers today, without any checks over it. To cite a few examples, innocent citizens have been imprisoned because they incurred the displeasure of some politician in power or his trusted aide or some executive officer. Homes of many citizens have been demolished in many parts of the country. A fear psychosis has overtaken the whole nation. People are living in a state of constant fear and are silently suffering. This is bad for any country and more so, for a democracy. Therefore, it is necessary that Emergency is ended, all extraordinary laws are rendered null and void and freedom of the people restored so that the entire nation can be rescued from the stage of impotence to which it has been reduced at present.

It is only too clear that you are not ready to do so therefore a common man will reasonably conclude that the government wants to continue in power through the means of emergency and extraordinary methods. It is difficult for me to associate myself with such a dispensation any longer. I am therefore sending my resignation from your cabinet and request you for its immediate acceptance at once.

I take this opportunity to thank you for the respect, courtesy and importance that you accorded me during the eleven years that I have been a member of your cabinet.

Wishing you speedy recovery and good health,

Yours,
(Jagjivan Ram)"[1]

The same day he wrote a second letter this time, to the Congress President, Shri Barua. Its text is given below:–

Congress is not working as a democratic organisation at present which is evidently in violation of the constitutional provisions, rules and regulations. I do not want to be associated with such a system. Therefore, I am resigning from the membership of the Congress Committee, the positions in all the committees working under the All India Congress Committee and the primary membership of the Indian National Congress.

I thank you for the importance given to me.

Yours,

(Jagjivan Ram)”[2]

Thus, Babu Jagjivan Ram resigned on 02 February 1977, from the Union Cabinet, Membership of the Congress Working Committee, several important committees of the party and even its primary membership. His resignation from Congress left a broad and deep impact upon the whole country. All the national newspapers published special articles on his long political career of 42 years. It was as if the country had been shaken by an earthquake. He became the topic of discussion throughout the country. National as well as the international news agency representatives made a beeline for his official residence at 6, Krishna Menon Road. This certainly symbolised the endless popular respect, unshakeable faith in and unlimited affection for him.

The same day, in the evening at his residence, Babu Jagjivan Ram announced the formation of a national-level political party—' Congress for Democracy' (CFD). He exhorted thus, “The time has come for the intellectuals of the country and the people of oppressed classes in particular, to come forward and be involved in nation-building.”[3] His appeal met with enthusiastic slogan-shouting by the assembled crowd viz ‘long live Babu Jagjivan Ram’, ‘How should the country's leader be, like Babu Jagjivan Ram only’ ‘messiah of the oppressed castes, Babu Jagjivan Ram’, ‘while the sun and moon are there, Babuji's name will stay’. The slogan shouting continued for quite a while.

Babu Jagjivan Ram deftly handled the volley of verbal questions, hurled at him, by the Press. A journalist asked him, "Why did you remain silent for 19 months?" Babu Jagjivan Ram immediately retorted, "action has to be taken at the right time, without that, it will not be successful. I understand that this is the right time for a change of regime. I have always taken correct decisions at the right time."[4] At the time, he was accompanied by the former chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, Shri Hemwati Nandan Bahuguna, former chief minister of Orissa, Smt. Nandini Satpathi, member of parliament, Shri D.N. Tiwari, former minister in Uttar Pradesh State Shri. Rajmangal Pandey and several other 'Congress For Democracy' party members.

People from all nooks and corners of the country continued to throng his house until the campaigning began for the general elections. Although CFD party was in a position to field its candidates on all the parliamentary seats, because of shortage of time the Election Commission expressed its inability to issue it an election symbol separately at such a short notice. Therefore the CFD party had no option but to go for an electoral alliance with the Janata Party and contest elections under its election symbol. In this way, leaders of the two main opposition parties reached an understanding and the Janata Party fielded candidates in the election fray all over the country. During the election campaign Babu Jagjivan Ram extensively toured hundreds of parliamentary constituencies. He was himself a candidate from Sasaram, Bihar. During the election campaign at Rohtas, he addressed a public meeting thus:

People are suffering in misery because of the Emergency imposed on the country, for the last nineteen months by the Prime Minister of the present government, in the garb of national security but actually just to save her position. It has led to a heavy atmosphere. People have been rendered mute and handicapped. This has been termed as 'peace prevailing in the country' but is this, the peace of a living nation? Our country has been rendered lifeless, it needs rejuvenation after this election. The draconian sections added to the Constitution of India at the behest of the Prime Minister need

to be repealed. The present administration needs to be uprooted. To restore democracy, you must vote for the Janata Party, on its election symbol of a farmer with a plough. If you fail this time, emergency will continue indefinitely for you and the Prime Minister will not commit the mistake of holding another election. You will continue to be in the grip of suffering, forever so you exercise your discretion. I am sure that you will vote after due consideration."[5]

Addressing a mammoth rally of almost one million people at Patna, Babu Jagjivan Ram observed, "Emergency continues in the country. People are being made to suffer under it. To end this, I have resigned from the Congress and the government. Your sufferings shall soon be over. I feel that there is a need for change in government on the auspicious occasion of these general elections. Now, you decide for yourself whom to vote for and who can put an end to your sufferings?[6]

Babu Jagjivan Ram had started his election campaign by addressing a huge crowd of about one million people at the Ramlila Ground in Delhi on 6 February 1977. Referring to the reasons for his resignation from the Congress as well as Government, he addressed the historical gathering there: "... The time has come to decide your fortune. I hope you will not err in electing public representatives. You will suffer indefinitely if you lose this opportunity. You have to exercise your discretion now."[7]

At the time, an 'appeal in the name of the nation' was issued by the CFD, under Babu Jagjivan Ram's leadership. Some excerpts follow:

"We have chosen to time our appeal now as the general elections are due and this probably is the last opportunity when the intention, to basically change the policy approved by the nation can be thwarted and invalidation in the different aspects of the national life can be countered. Today, the vested interests are being given facilities and concessions in the garb of a new program. On the other hand, the workers are denied even their legal rights. It is important to also consider the serious outcome of the methods of implementation of land reforms. In reality there have been barely any land reforms. The rule of law has been replaced by the rule

of a coterie. The credibility of the supreme judicial authority in the country has been damaged. The poor and the minority have become insecure. The very purpose of all our social and economic programs is being defeated and the common man is distancing himself away from the congress and the government. The leadership, which is forcing the minorities and the deprived away from the congress, is challenging the most important principles of the Indian National Congress and Indian political tradition. We have decided to speak openly now as our silence will yield a blow to national integration. We will try our best to re-instil confidence in the psyche of the minorities and the weaker sections. We reiterate that our aim is to safeguard the best traditions of the Indian National Congress. Through honesty, civility and courtesy in public life, we can save our democratic system from disintegration as it is now heading towards despotism and tyranny. We have decided to support the long-suffering, poor and the disadvantaged people and for this we are ready to pay any price. In this holy task, we seek the active support of all progressive countrymen and appeal to all the responsible Congressmen to listen to the voice of their conscience. This is a critical period when safeguarding democracy is the main issue before our country. We shall join this battle of principles by placing confidence in the public and we are confident of success in our goal."[8]

Babu Jagjivan Ram addressed many meetings in various states of the country and appealed to the public for full support, to ensure a win for his party candidates. Wherever he addressed an election meeting a massive crowd gathered to hear him. It was seen that whenever, he was delayed due to lack of availability of the means of transport, the crowd waiting for their dear leader would stay till late at night. Such was his charismatic influence and when the votes were counted and the poll results declared, Babu Jagjivan Ram won the Sasaram seat by almost two lakh votes. Janata Party achieved full majority in the Lok Sabha. It was decided to elect the leader of the party in writing by the elected members on 23 March 1977 but this democratic procedure was sidelined and Shri Morarji Desai was chosen as the leader of the Janata Party.

Without the advice of such a senior leader of the country as Babu Jagjivan Ram because of whom, the party gained a majority in the Lok Sabha, to alter the pre-determined democratic procedure of choosing the leader in Janata Party on the basis of the written opinion of the newly elected members and in his absence, choosing the party's leader by another method definitely became the leading cause for outrage amongst the weaker sections, in the country.

C.F.D. Party termed this treatment by Janata Party towards Babu Jagjivan Ram as 'trickery'. Therefore opposing the choice by undemocratic means of the leader in Janata Party with full majority in the Lok Sabha, C.F.D Party functionaries decided that Babu Jagjivan Ram would not join the new cabinet. The intellectual class of the country was dismayed at this decision. Almost all the Janata Party members wanted Babu Jagjivan Ram to join the cabinet. Those who contacted him at his residence and requested him to join the cabinet and guide the country included Chandra Shekhar, Morarji Desai, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, George Fernandes, Madhu Limaye and Nanaji Deshmukh.

Loknayak Jai Prakash Narayan sent a letter to Babu Jagjivan Ram through Shri Nanaji Deshmukh. Some excerpts are:

"I understand your sentiments and respect them. Still, your full support is most required for the country at present. You are therefore, humbly requested to please extend your full cooperation and good wishes to the new Prime Minister. In this lies your dignity as well. You are not just an ordinary individual but a political and social force without whose support, it is impossible to build a new India."[9]

Yielding to this special request by Loknayak Jai Prakash Narayan and respecting the public aspirations, Babu Jagjivan Ram finally joined the Janata Party cabinet as the Defence Minister. Thus once again, he assumed the duty to protect India. Babu Jagjivan Ram made full efforts to ensure an uninterrupted supply of defence provisions that the country may become self-reliant. On the other hand, he continued working for the welfare of the oppressed classes. For resolving the problems of the oppressed classes he

gave formal suggestions to the Janata Party. Some excerpts are given below:

"...There are several aspects of the problems of the scheduled castes—economic, social and religious. The reality of their present economic and social status should be taken into consideration before seeking a solution to these problems. Also the need of the hour is to make available, most of the benefits of economic development, to the backward classes...The justified demand to hike the wages of the agricultural-labour is being raised today but it has been generally seen that the upper caste people are opposing this also... The problem would have been legally resolved had it been simple. For example, if the land of an owner is forcibly allotted to a landless scheduled caste person, there will naturally be a confrontation between the land-owners and the landless labour. However when scheduled class people are allotted government land and the allottees are targeted then this controversy assumes the form of class conflict. Under the circumstances, this cannot be considered as an ordinary happening... This reinforces the feeling of insecurity among the scheduled caste people. Taking advantage of this situation, the political forces will definitely blame the present leadership. It is of utmost importance to continue the land-distribution among the landless under the Land Reform Act and to implement effectively, the Land Ceiling Act."[10]

Babu Jagjivan Ram never lost sight of the fundamental objective of securing their rights for the oppressed classes people. He considered all disparities as not only inhuman but also criminal. This is why, his birthday on 5 April is celebrated as 'equality day' all over the country. In his eyes, the reservation for uplift of the oppressed castes was based on the principle of equality only. He always resisted all forms of casteism. He wrote thus:

"In context of the perspective of the democratic principles of our country, under the circumstances, the benefits of reservation extended to those who are socially, economically and culturally backward, cannot be seen as unjustified. Revamping of the country's economy is tied up with the process of basic changes in the commercial infrastructure. Actually, land-allotment to genuine

farmers is... to some extent, like carrying the light of freedom to the rural areas. It will bring back uniformity and democracy to the villages."[11]

As an advocate of the principle of equality, Babu Jagjivan Ram hit at the basis of the present social system in the country when he opined, "caste and democracy cannot co-exist."[12] Referring to the guidance by the constitution of the country, he wrote, "...Through universal suffrage and other rights and privileges mentioned in it, the Indian Constitution demands participation by all....in the process of correct decision making. It sets the direction and ideals for our future social progress. It believes that the traditional social system will change. It assimilates the commitment to provide equal opportunity to all. It widens the horizon of aspirations. In this context, it should be clear to all thinkers that caste and democracy cannot co-exist. I have been saying this for more than the last 30 years. I have been debating in favour of equal priority to the 'social' factors along with the 'political and economic' ones. Many people have agreed to consider the problems of scheduled castes, backward castes and women as that of welfare only. This is a problem of transforming social consciousness in accordance with the democratic values and beliefs. It is the problem of getting rid of such thoughts which appear plausible due to familiarity. This issue is one of associating some of the best practices of the present democratic values with our thoughts and philosophy. This issue (social) is of a change in the levels of influence where equality begins to achieve the aim of progress."[13]

India is the biggest democracy in the world. It is important to make continous efforts to strengthen it, in the light of its extensiveness. Cautioning about the dimensions and the power of democracy, Babu Jagjivan Ram observed, "Democracy is a jealous beloved. It requires constant attention and continous care. At the altar of this Goddess, major sacrifices have to be performed. A citizen is the main link in the chain of democracy. The strength of the chain lies in the power of the individual."[14] Therefore whereas the people's power in the country is stable, the government constituted by the peoples' representatives elected by a democratic

procedure is temporary. Thus, considering as fundamental, the clear and direct defined parameters of democracy, it is the social obligation of the government to counter disparities of any sort among the people.

In January 1979, Babu Jagjivan Ram became the Deputy Prime Minister of the country. Janata Party's rule at the centre ended two years before its due tenure because of the differences of opinion amongst its top senior leaders. Mid-term Lok Sabha polls were held in 1980. Once more Babu Jagjivan Ram contested the elections from Sasaram and won the seat. The Congress registered two-thirds majority in the Lok Sabha and Smt. Indira Gandhi became the Prime Minister of the country again.

Unfortunately, soon after the country became afflicted with terrorism. Civil defence was endangered. Smt. Gandhi resolved to weed out terrorism and succeeded to a large extent in doing so. However, it was the country's misfortune that on 31 October 1984, her own security guards shot her dead and she became a martyr for India. The country faced a grave crisis at her brutal assassination.

Under the circumstances, her son, Shri Rajiv Gandhi took over the reins of the country. Mid-term Lok-Sabha polls were again held in the last month of the year 1984. Babu Jagjivan Ram contested the polls and won from the Sasaram parliamentary constituency yet again. Congress (I) secured more than 400 seats and Shri Rajiv Gandhi again became the Prime Minister of India.

Babu Jagjivan Ram led various ministries in the union cabinet and contributed to nation building. During 1980-1986, as a senior opposition leader in the Lok Sabha he demonstrated his parliamentary skills according to the democratic ideals and the highest standards of human values.

Considering equality as a fundamental principle, Babu Jagjivan Ram believed in establishing a casteless society in the interest of society and throughout his life he fought for accomplishing this. Mahatma Gandhi had shaken the very foundations of casteism in India much before Independence. In this regard, Babu Jagjivan

Ram wrote thus, about the father of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi, "Mahatma Gandhi dealt a final and powerful blow to the old caste system. He countered it determinedly and cautiously. He did not advance by challenging the primary beliefs of the four-tier caste order and yet, to some extent he succeeded in shaking the foundations of this very system. We have to take forward the work that he began One has to concede that freedom is the ultimate goal of the human life. Anything that devalues and hurts human dignity restricts freedom as well. It has to be that the question of eradicating casteism and untouchability, should not ignore the broad aspects of human sentiments and achievement of freedom."[15]

Highlighting the significance of Gandhi's ideals of *Sarvodaya* Babu Jagjivan Ram wrote, "Fortunately, Mahatma Gandhi has given us the ideal of *Sarvodaya.* such a social form that points towards the establishment of a casteless and classless society has become a declared goal now. In such a society, each individual will benefit from unlimited opportunities as per the best of his abilities, where each individual will be able to fulfill his highest aspirations without social pressures, where he will get equal treatment and where all will be free. It is our misfortune that those who claim to follow these directions of Mahatma Gandhi connect religious rites and rituals to the ethos behind his teachings while the sentiments have been forgotten. However, there are some commendable signs that mistakes have been admitted and sincere efforts are being made to the best of our abilities to follow the path shown by Mahatma Gandhi. Indian economy is being reorganised in a way where the new ideas of human dignity and freedom may find support and acceptance."[16]

The society and individual are inseparable as they cannot exist in exclusion of each other. A developed society is one where the individuals of all castes and religions not only enjoy the freedom of equal oppurtunity for their development but have also progressed due to it. For example, can such a society be termed as a developed one where some castes become fully advanced while a community of people is unable to progress because of the lack of facilities?

No! A developed society is one where none lags behind socially or economically, as per the set standards of the country.

Directing attention to the socialisation of political peace, Babu Jagjivan Ram stated, "Whereas the eradication of casteism, which points to a revolution in social consciousness has become a historical necessity, psychological insecurity has emerged because of some orthodox links of religion and traditions as such a situation draws people to their castes and languages. From the beginning, all politicians and political outfits, for the fulfilment of their electoral objectives, have manipulated the caste system to the full. This has happened inspite of their branding the social divisions as wrong. Somehow, the democratic process of politics has given an oppurtunity to the oppressed classes to strike new deals to break the monopoly of political and economic power being enjoyed by the so-called upper caste people."[17]

Unfortunately, Babu Jagjivan Ram's only son, Suresh Ram expired in May 1985. This was a severe blow to him and Suresh's mother, Indrani Devi. Now in his old age, the only ray of hope was his daughter, Meira Kumar, a senior official in the Indian Foreign Service. She resigned from her government job to carry forward the tasks begun by Babu Jagjivan Ram. On Congress ticket, she contested the election and won from the Bijnore Lok Sabha constituency in Uttar Pradesh. Thus, Meira Kumar carried forward her parental legacy of welfare measures for the oppressed classes. The daughter of Suresh Ram, Ms. Rashmi (alias Medhavi Kirti) too put up a brave front in dispensing her social and familial responsibilities.

The 78th birthday of Babu Jagjivan Ram was celebrated as 'Samta Divas' Equality Day, on 5 April 1986. On that occasion, the then Prime Minister of India Shri Rajiv Gandhi participated as the special guest. He observed, "....Babuji played an important role in nation building..... He has always guided the nation. I request him to continue providing further guidance to the country."[18]

Who knew that Babu Jagjivan Ram's birthday being celebrated that day as the Equality Day would be his last. On the occasion of his birthday, Babu Jagjivan Ram's words were simple, clear and

heartfelt, "I have always considered the nation as of foremost importance. Sometime back, to counter the several terrible problems facing the nation, Shri Rajiv Gandhi sought my advice. In the interest of the nation, I have counselled him selflessly. He bears witness to this......Whether I am there or not, we are there or not, India will always be there. Where the issue of the unity and the integrity of the nation is concerned neither caste nor religion nor language nor region is any the greater. These are all insignificant in comparison with the nation, they exist only because of the nation. If there is no nation, would these be there at all? This is why I say that the nation is supreme."[19] In fact, this is the philosophy, teaching and guidance as well as the summary of Babu Jagjivan Ram's life. At the time, Punjab was ravaged by terrorism. As a result, the people in the state and its neighbouring areas were a terrorised lot. Hundreds had fallen prey to inhuman terrorism. A general atmosphere of fear prevailed. To redeem the situation, on 7 April 1986, the then Prime Minister of India, Shri Rajiv Gandhi constituted a standing committee of the National Integration Council, with Babu Jagjivan Ram as its chairman.[20] The total number of members in the committee was twenty one.

Babu Jagjivan Ram had been suffering from asthma. He was admitted to Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital on 8 May 1986 when he complained of breathlessness. He seemed to be responding to the treatment which continued for about three weeks. However, his condition grew critical from 30 June 1986. All over the nation, people prayed for his well-being but destiny had other plans and he expired on 6 July 1986 in the morning. The nation was grief-stricken. In honour of the deceased leader, the Government of India declared national mourning of three days. Government offices in India were closed as a mark of respect to him. An official announcement was made to lower the National Flag for three days in government offices.

When Babu Jagjivan Ram's body was brought from the hospital to his residence in Delhi at 6, Krishna Menon Road, people from all over the country thronged the place to catch a last glimpse of their dear leader and pay their emotional tributes to him. His

bereaved wife, Smt. Indrani Devi received many condolence messages from within and outside India.

A few among them are reproduced here:

Shri Jagjivan Ram has left behind a long history of sincere service to the nation. To uplift the poor and the oppressed classes was Babuji's goal. He was the ray of hope for the backward and the oppressed sections of the society.

—Giani Zail Singh, (then) President of India

Babu Jagjivan Ram was a great personality from a lineage of patriots. We have to toil ceaselessly for the fulfilment of Babuji's ideals. He devoted his life to the country. He was the symbol of the struggle by the scheduled castes and other classes to end the social and economic disparities.

—Rajiv Gandhi, (then) Prime Minister of India

With Babuji's demise the nation has lost a courageous freedom fighter. He was an able administrator and a prominent politician.

—R. Venkatraman, (then) Vice-president of India

The country has lost yet another great leader of its freedom movement. Babuji fought strongly for the country's independence and the establishment of democracy.

—P.V. Narasimha Rao, (then) Union Minister for Human Resources Development

The country has lost an important leader who served it for decades.

— Narayan Dutt Tiwari, Union Minister for Industries

Babuji had a special place in his heart for people from the weaker and the backward classes.

—Buta Singh, (then) Union Home Minister

The country has lost a visionary leader.

—Atal Bihari Vajpayee, (then) President, Bhartiya Janata Party

With Babuji's demise, the country has lost a pillar of freedom movement. All his life, he worked for the uplift of the poor and the weaker classes.

—Chandra Shekhar, (then) President, Janata Party

People from all corners of the country reached Chandwa to attend his funeral. Prominent among these were, the President of India, Giani Zail Singh, Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi, the Governor and the Chief Minister of Bihar, many central and state ministers beside son-in law, Shri Manjul Kumar. Babu Jagjivan Ram's last rites were performed with state honours near the memorial graves of his parents. His grandson, Anshul Avijit (son of Meira Kumar) performed the funeral rites. Thus the nation bid the last farewell to a builder of modern India.

The entire country was Babu Jagjivan Ram's field of action. In view of his exemplary contribution to nation-building and respectful deep faith in him of millions of oppressed classes people, the then Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi allocated fourteen acres of land near Rajghat in Delhi for Babu Jagjivan Ram's memorial. 'Samta-Sthal' (place of equality). The entire country salutes him in remembrance of his dedicated services.

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Equality And Society

DURING his long political innings on the sacred land of this country, Babu Jagjivan Ram dreamt of establishing a society where all are equal, none is low or high in status, there in no discrimination on the basis of caste or religion and all can realise their potential on the basis of merit and calibre.

As a top leader of the oppressed masses, Babu Jagjivan Ram always told the orthodox and caste-conscious people, politicians and the separatists favouring caste-oriented divisions in the society that communal harmony is essential for the sovereignty of the country. The integrity and unity of the country lies in binding the society with strong ties of uniformity in equality. Babu Jagjivan Ram said, "Humanity is the only caste for human beings. There are no castes among the human beings. Yes, the animals are identified on the basis of their species."

Babu Jagjivan Ram's struggle for an equitable Indian society free from egalitarian man-made caste-discriminations began from his student days in 1922 at Chandwa village school. While pursuing higher studies from Calcutta University, he founded the 'Students Equality Union' (*Vidyarthi Samta Sangh*) with the support of the poor students and provided admirable leadership. At the time, freedom struggle was gaining ground.

During his student life, Babu Jagjivan Ram met Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and poet laureaute Rabindranath Tagore and held discussions with them on social disparities. In Calcutta, he undertook social service to rid the society of untouchability. He brought about awareness of their rights among the residents of labourers colonies, slums and camps. People from all over the country thronged Calcutta in search of employment leading to increased population density and labour-class problems. Babu

Jagjivan Ram organised the labourers to protest against exploitation. He established labour unions for their welfare. He inspired their women for social uplift and better education for their children.

This book delves into the untiring efforts of Babu Jagjivan Ram for the eradication of the social disparities prevailing in India but the author does not want to repeat himself. It would, however, be pertinent to mention that after many reforms and lengthy discussions and protests, the father of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi finally did accept under the British administration, the reservation proposal of the British parliament aimed at bringing crore of the people from the oppressed classes, repressed for centuries, into the mainstream of the society.

The society has changed a lot since the vedic era. Interesting details of the contemporary agrarian system and its structure then prevailing in the society are found in the holy scriptures, the *vedas* and the *upanishad*. However it seems that we have not moulded our lives according to the vedas and also not accepted their guidance on one hand, we see the world as a global family while on the other we find unprivileged groups in this caste-ridden country's large society, thousands and lakhs of people divided into scattered groups. Definitely, the caste system threatens the integrity and sovereignty of India.

In a historical speech at the Red Fort Ground, Babu Jagjivan Ram said, "the oppressed classes have always made siginificant contributions to social progress but unfortunately they have never received their due share in development. This has been so under a well-formulated seheme. Their lot in history has been ignored so that they never realise that the progress of the society has been possible only due to their incomparable labour."[1] Today, due to the spread of education, people have become aware of their rights and they yearn to secure them too.

A study of the world religions and beliefs shows us that people follow the spiritual path to realise divine powers. It is a fact that in non-human society, castes are not found as they do not exist and only the animals are identified by their species. Our civilisation

and culture is as complex as it is ancient. After birth, a human is a form of a human being only. A human being acquires distinctive traits by his demographical conditions and the environment marks his skin as fair or black or yellow or pink, features as lovely, ordinary or ugly, and disposition as wise or foolish but certainly, a uniform human being only. Caste-distinctions are baseless, unreasonable, artificial, man–made and selfish and threaten the integrity and sovereignty of the country.

Social reformers and saints worked to do away with the century-old caste discriminations. Babu Jagjivan Ram wrote : "In 1935, at Ranchi, I deposed before the Hammond Committee in my capacity as the President of the 'Oppressed Classes League' to present the views of the oppressed castes people in national perspective. I argued for their healthy representation and due participation in the government."[2]

The British administration was trying to weaken the freedom movement by hook or crook. They did not want their rule to be over, with India gaining freedom. In this context, Babu Jagjivan Ram wrote, "the Christian missionaries and the British administration were offering incentives to our people. The Britishers were seeking to divide the opposition. Their idea was to somehow tempt the oppressed classes people and the Muslims, away from the campaign of Indian nationalism. Promises of financial aid and facilities were being made to the people from oppressed classes and the Muslims. I stood up against all lures of this kind and I prevented religious conversions."[3] Babu Jagjivan Ram's ceaseless toil certainly checked mass-scale religious conversions and imparted a renewed vigour to this country's civilisation and culture. He provided a new power to the Hindu philosophy which will be inscribed in golden letters in the history of the country along with his name.

Capabilities are definitely the basis of a man's calibre and his skill, taking which as a collective component, a country's economic standing can be evaluated.[4] To gain information about the standard-of-living of the people of a country, we have to assess from a

collective stand, income, land and the products of that country. This can only be possible in a situation when the accepted data of that country's economy is available to us.[5] However, in India social diversities have influenced economic disparities to a great extent. A main reason for this is the caste differences among people on the basis of which they are classified as inferior or superior due to which the calibre, potential and skills are rendered meaningless for the exploited oppressed classes. It is because of the prejudiced mentality among the higher castes. Consequently social diversity leads to inequality among people and this is why economic disparity prevails in our society.[6] Casteism in the society needs to be done away with for the country's betterment. On the basis of equality, individual's calibre, potential and skills should be correctly assessed and evaluated so that they can easily, simply and fairly choose any occupation, trade, commerce, industry and governmental or non-governmental service. This will definitely put an end to the social disintegration and exploitation in the society and taking all along collectively the country will prosper, develop, strengthen and progress.

The ideas and actions of Babu Jagjivan Ram and his nation-building deeds for the crore of countrymen were in sync. He had the divine gift of aligning himself to the natural scenario, flora-fauna, the costumes, languages and conduct of others. He believed equality to be the individual's birth-right. His life was a saga of success as well as trials and tribulations. Whether holding a governmental position or not, he always hit at poverty, social inequality and discriminations.

While speaking in a debate on the motion of thanks on the presidential address on 28 January 1980 Babu Jagjivan Ram said: "We have to fight poverty, overcome unemployment, eradicate inequality and increase the agricultural yield. Which political party can differ on this, but the question arises as to how are you going to stick to the guidelines provided? Could this be accomplished under the current social system? You have not paid attention to this. Can poverty be alleviated in the present economic

system? No instructions were issued in this regard. Can disparities be removed only by increasing the crops-yield? Well production has grown but so has poverty. Therefore there is some hurdle somewhere, some bottleneck at some place. This has been ignored in the president's address. There were hopes that the new government will shed some light on this. Yet, the corridors remain dark as ever...... I also say to you that you take a giant step forward and say that we are going to break away with traditions and you admit that under the prevailing economic order, we cannot alleviate poverty. If you say so in a sincere manner then you will have our cooperation because this problem is not only of the government, this problem is a national problem. I do not believe in leaving you alone to find a solution to this problem while just criticising you. This is such a great undertaking, a complex endeavour. It is shameful to see the plight of the people living below poverty-line. It is embarassing when others say that there are crore of people in India whose daily earnings are less than 50 paise. Therefore, it would do no good to castigate the Government. We all would have to contribute in this task."[7]

In the perspective of equality, Babu Jagjivan Ram always sought opportunities to benefit the people by encouraging the human skills and capabilities. How can the individual's talents and potential be fostered in a society where caste distinctions prevail? In this regard, Nobel prize winner, Dr. Amartya Sen observes, "In fact, capability cannot be evaluated only for equality but also assessed for calibre. If capability is to be defined in the context of economic potential, we find that an individual's talent cannot be promoted untill the universal standard of qualification remains stable at the same level for each individual. The social evaluation of the structure of equality clearly assesses the distinctions of the universally accepted facts."[8]

Without considering the potential, the demands for equality can neither be analysed not understood. It can also not be argued that the demands for equality be seen conclusively in the perspective of the weight of competitive current demands.[9] It is quite important that the demand for equality are analysed not only on fully assessed

ideology but also on other related criterion and human welfare. If the demands for equality are correctly analysed then the baseless demands which are not socially but politically motivated will be exposed as such. The constitutional provision of extending reservation in Government jobs to the people from the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes for their collective economic and social development was successful to some extent, in giving a concrete shape to the principle of equality, where these deprived people of the society are concerned.

Babu Jagjivan Ram will be remembered as a sober realist thinker who tried to bring about equality in a disparities-riddled society. His life was a saga of struggles yet people bear witness to his unique and memorable efforts for re-establishing a casteless society. Explaining the structure of inequality in the country, Babu Jagjivan Ram wrote, "Human being has proved to be the most capable and intelligent of all beings, in nature's creation. With his own progress, he has also created and developed the society. The creation of society resulted in the decline of the divine traits. To do away with discrimination, inequality and class- rivalries such philosophies emerged as gave out a message for establishing divinity in society and bridging the artificial gap between human beings. Plato's endeavours to establish equality were aimed to rid the elite of sheer ignorance while Samanacharya hit directly at the four-varna (four-classes) system to highlight the anomaly of birth-based discriminatory system."[10]

The fast growing social inequality gave rise to disparities between human beings. Social discriminations created rifts among people whereas economic differences made them miserable. The resistance meted out to these inequalities could not bring about any notable changes. Babu Jagjivan Ram commented: "From the very day of its foundation being laid, caste system faced resistance. Not only the followers of *tantra* (black magic) philosophy and practice but also the prominent followers of the *vedic* tradition did not lag behind in opposing it. Saints from many provinces of India launched scathing verbal attacks. They admonished the eminent folks in society for their shallow understanding of the *Vedas* and other

scriptures. Crore of the deprived people in the society were attracted to their efforts to uproot the idea of superiority by birth and caste... On the basis of their knowledge gained through spiritual practices and experience, they unravelled the mysteries of the world and opposed social disparities. Crore of people in the society had become a humiliated, group because of discrimination in the caste-order. The saints spread their message of dignity, self-esteem, equality and humanism. Crowd rushed to hear them. Saintly exhortations shook the very foundations of the *Vedic* caste system in all the four directions of north, south, east and west. Equality was sought through verses of Alvar saints in south, Vadals and Shankar Deva in East, Tukaram, Namdeva and Gyandeva in Maharashtra and several other saints in north-India."[11]

It is difficult to gauge the in-depth knowledge that Babu Jagjivan Ram acquired from studying the present form of social inequality. However, he did come to know about the beginning of erosion of equality among people from its initial stages till the structure of contemporary society. To eradicate disparities from the society was the ultimate aim of Babu Jagjivan Ram's life and to achieve this he strove throughout his life.

Babu Jagjivan Ram considered Indian saints and the religious movements quite significant. He believed that "not only the deprived communities but the so-called elite class were also impressed by the origin of many liberal equality-based religions in medieval India. It was like a clean breeze. It was not just about responsibilities but rights too. However, later came a situation where crores were unfortunate enough to be saddled only with responsibilities while many enjoyed the rights irresponsibly. This transition-period in Indian history was a trying time for the Hindu religion and the Hindu society as it appeared as if the Hindu society would disintegrate but this did not happen. With spiritual practices, there emerged from this spurned community, brilliant and forceful saints who spoke of equality. The common man's voice exposed publicly the hollowness of caste system and anomalies in the birth-based caste-order. Many of these saints were outcastes, from communities that had been kept on the fringe

of or barely inside the sphere of Hinduism and society viz. outcaste *shudra*, lowly *shudra* or *shudra*, *malechcha* or *chaandaal*, slave-servant or artisans. At the time, in Kashi arose saint Ravidas. A cobbler by profession, Saint Ravidas became educated in the spiritual practices of yoga and samadhi in the school of meditation. His heart and speech grew pure as he came to see divinity in human beings. He grew eloquent, pouring forth immortal verses."[12]

Believing caste- discriminations to be driven by selfish motives, Saint Ravidas made efforts for social equality. He exposed before the society the absurdity of caste system through his poetic verses. He overcame many obstacles along the way to seek equality among people. Calling Saint Ravidas, an alert sentinel of divinity in human beings, Babu Jagjivan Ram wrote: "Today when the oppressed community of India is searching for its persona, trying to discover equality-based traditions of humanist beliefs then it should face its past, the history which the victors have destroyed and distorted and still we catch glimpses of our own history between the lines. For example, the penal provisions in *Manusmriti* are a eulogy of the strength of our ancestors, an ode to their spirit and evidence of their indomitable will-power. The tradition of saints introduced that power, spirit and self-actualisation process to crore of the sons of God, beings with divine element, deprived of the fundamental human rights. Guru Ravidas was a brilliant luminary of this tradition - soft - spoken, peaceful, confident, brilliant, firm, humanist and egalitarian.[13]

As a youth, Babu Jagjivan Ram suffered the unpleasantness of the practice of untouchability during his active involvement in the freedom struggle of the country between 1932 and 1946. In this fight against social inequality, he gained the complete support of Mahatma Gandhi and sought to eradicate untouchability from the country. In September 1946, when the British transferred power to the union government then the father of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi wrote a note about the main points for consideration in the country to three prominent leaders of the country included in the interim government. A leading educationist of India, former President Dr. Shankar Dayal Sharma wrote : "His (Babu Jagjivan

Ram's) importance can be gauged from the note that Bapu (Mahatma Gandhi) wrote on 2 September 1946, addressing Jagjivan Ram, Sardar Patel and Dr. Rajendra Prasad. In this, Mahatma Gandhi wrote, "since the devotional prayers, I have been thinking of you. Repeal the salt law, remember Dandi-march, take Hindus and Muslims along together, eradicate untouchability and adopt khadi."[14]

All seem to be committed to end discriminations. However, it has been observed in reality that those who oppose casteism do not practise what they preach, in their own daily life. In this regard, the *Vedic* ideology does not display pragmatism in life. The intelligentsia and the elite remain confined to their own world. They are oblivious to the inequality prevailing in the caste-gripped society and are unable to banish superstitions and blind beliefs from their life. Generally a conflict prevails over this between their consciousness and semi-consciousness. At a personal level, this speech-action dichotomy creates differences also in law and its implementation. A country–wide agitation took place when America abolished slavery through law and the Government had to resort to stringent steps to control the movement. However, there were no protests in our country when untouchability was abolished by law. Why? Perhaps because even the hardliner Hindus also found the move just. However, the Act remained so, in name only. Some liberal supporters of scheduled castes should take the credit for this. For many people, the problem of the scheduled caste people is the problem of the betterment of these poor folks. According to them, social liberalism is the means for those whom fate has not treated kindly. Mahatama Gandhi was of the opinion that, "If untouchability is eradicated, then castes should themselves be annihilated completely."[15]

A true Hindu himself, Babu Jagjivan Ram respected all religions equally. He possessed knowledge not only of the Hindu scriptures, epics, Upanishads but was also conversant with the scriptures of other religions in the world. This is why, his ideas about any religion found universal appeal. A tolerant person, he

was deeply saddened by the deep-rooted caste-differences in Hinduism which posed a big challenge for the society. The ill-effects of caste-distinctions did not spare other religions as well. In this regard, Babu Jagjivan Ram wrote, "Even religions which did not believe untouchability to be its part were also affected by casteist influences. This in itself points towards the problem of scheduled castes. Whatever the ideas and these appear to be tied-up with the Hindu religious customs – the roots of the problem have been traced to our social and economic system. Therefore its solution is also discovered in the complete overhaul of the structure of the socio-economic system."[16]

Babu Jagjivan Ram advocated reservation for the scheduled castes and scheduled tribe people in Government service so that the people deprived for centuries may upgrade their economic status. He always linked reservation with equal opportunities. His idea was that a standard of merit be set in national interest because if the people of deprived classes in the society are not represented in the administration then this deprived community would certainly not be able to discharge its responsibility towards the society or join the mainstream.

Participating in a debate in the Lok Sabha on 5 March 1981, Babu Jagjivan Ram said, "competence and calibre should be examined, it should be assessed once for all and this can happen when a judicial commission of supreme court judges is set-up for this with one Hindu, one Muslim and a Christian member. Today the one who does not like us determines our calibre. The calibre of the candidates and employees from the reserved category is decided by one who does not want them there in the first place. He has the say in the decision on their competence. I want to state with conviction that given opportunities, people from the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes are not ones to lag behind in any area and they have proved it whenever the occasion arose.

I only want equality in opportunities. I would not want patronage even for one day if you just provide equal oppurtunities to all. We have full faith in our youths but where is the equality? You give scholarships and oblige us but you give only that much scholarship

as can fill half the stomach, not full. One's legs are bound while the others' are massaged and one day, untying the legs you ask both to run, claiming fair competition. This is the fair competition that we have. I have also been here and cannot absolve myself from blame. Today, the situation is such that many harbour the pain of reservation in their hearts but do not express it for social propriety. Therefore, they ask me as to what do the Brahmins do? I wish to state that this is not a question of patronage nor one of economy nor a question of employment but the question is whether or not you want all the people of this country to participate in its Government? Those days are gone when some thought that it was their privilege to rule and others were to be ruled. This will no longer be. Therefore today whether it is scheduled classes, scheduled tribe, other backward classes, Muslims or Christians, you will have to give them the facility to participate in the government... and if you do not do this then history is witness that here, the Brahmin were wise and the *kshatriya* (warrior) brave yet the country was enslaved. You should never seek to repeat history.

All political parties want the reservation provisions to stay. The people agree but have you ever wondered as to why these people could get only four-per cent posts in the class-one category, in the last thirty years? Would it take a whole century for them to get their rightful place? Do you think that they will patiently wait for a century?

Would you not want an administrative enquiry into all this? A commission to enquire into the competence of the government servants belonging to the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes. They are accused of incompetence. A judicical commission should investigate their competence. I want to tell you that their competence is second to none."[17]

It is evident that Babu Jagjivan Ram always came forth to protect the rights of the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other weaker sections and was keen to provide patronage and upgrade their socio-economic status. During his long career as a parliamentarian, Babu Jagjivan Ram, always holding national interest as supreme actively participated in thousands of discussions

and made invaluable contribution in preserving the unity and integrity of the country.

It is common knowledge that as a great national leader of the oppressed classes, Babu Jagjivan Ram played a key role in framing the constitution of the country. His contribution was crucial with regard to the formulation of Fundamental Rights and the Directive Principles of State Policy. Fundamental Rights are the heart of the Constitution and the right to equality finds central place amongst all these Fundamental Rights and to provide it uniformly to each citizen of the country is the obligation of the Constitution. In other words, the Constitution of the country promises to provide to each citizen of the country, the right to equality and its lawful protection. The scope of equality is vast and extensive. If the provisions of the right to equality as mentioned in the Constitution are analysed, two facets emerge – one is equality before law and the other is equal protection by law. This provision implies that all people equal in a sphere will be treated equally.

The common masses always benefitted by the equality of opportunities based on the premise of equality put forth by Babu Jagjivan Ram since he conceived and saw to the implementation of policies and programmes for their socio-economic uplift. While participating in the debate on the vote of thanks on the Presidential address, on 25 February 1981 Babu Jagjivan Ram observed: "..This country's Muslims have been here for centuries. It is dangerous for the democracy of a country if a section remains apprehensive. Who can say that today the muslims in the country do not suffer from fear-psychosis? Who can claim that fear-psychosis is not there among the Christians? Who can assert that there is no fear-psychosis among the oppressed communities in the country? It is there within Congress, the Janata Party people, in Jana Sangha folks inside all, because we are all part of society. It will not be enough to say that since we are congressmen we do not suffer from it. I have been in the Congress. I can also claim to know at least as much of its principles as others. Therefore not principles but practice shall work. I am asking, what measures does the government plan, to prevent what is happening in India

today, there should have been mention of how the apprehensions of Muslims shall be dealt with and how will they be adequately represented in administration. Representation in governance is not an economic issue. It determines as to whether or not, all sections of citizens are included in administration..."[18] This expression definitely appears based on Babu Jagjivan Ram's philosophy of equality and foresight arising from his love and affection towards all people in the society.

History is witness that great men face hurdles in philanthropy. Babu Jagjivan Ram led a difficult life. He challenged the inequality among the human beings and lifelong, he fought for the cause of equality as an integral part of life. People from all sections in the country salute him for this invaluable contribution of the right to human equality. In memory of this great son of the soil, 'Babu Jagjivan Ram Smriti Samiti' (memorial committee) was established to realise the objective of actively giving a concrete shape to the principle that he advocated, of equality in society. Several organisations founded in the country were named after this great man, scholars received the Ph.D., D.Litt. degrees on his works from universities and research and reference work about him has been undertaken. Untiring efforts of 'Babu Jagjivan Ram Smriti Sansthan', and the cooperation of his daughter, Meira Kumar has made possible, the beautification of his memorial, near Rajghat in Delhi,[19] installation of his life-size bronze statue in the parliament[20] and naming a hospital in Delhi after him[21], definitely, is a unique expression of regard in which the people of this country held Babu Jagjivan Ram. Today, the country is experiencing an awakening against caste-discriminations. People of all sections in the society favour an integrated society. Indeed, caste distinction is a blot on the right to equality. The task of eradicating inequality from the society, that Babu Jagjivan Ram undertook, is his story of struggle.

Unveiling the lifesize bronze statue of Babu Jagjivan Ram on 25 August 1995 at a function organised at the Parliament, a top scholar of the country, then the President of India, Dr. Shankar

Dayal Sharma said : "Jagjivan Ramji completely represents people in administration. He never forgot his humble origins and was in fact, proud of it. Through the medium of his achievements, this pride was conveyed to countless others while making them aware of their rights. His voice rose strongly against being sidelined as every fifth neglected Indian faces this in his daily life. Like a true nationalist he felt that the nation should be so strong as to strengthen even the people belonging to very weak sections. Taking note of the traditions, without wasting time, he efficiently conceived welfare programmes to remove discriminations among human beings. As a patron of reservation, he emphasised that this will instill confidence in the backward communities which are the claimants being in majority among the population of this country."[22]

India and the USA are the two big democratic countries in the world. Like caste- discriminations among the people in India, there is apartheid (color - discrimination) in America. The problem of caste - distinctions in our country is complex because of the inmumerable castes present which depicts the inequality among people. In America, the color-discrimination is mainly between black and white skin. America is today the biggest power in the world. The present progress of America is attributed to the optimum utilisation of its human resources. American people fought against apartheid as its history portrays. Commenting on apartheid, the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorder established in America, said, "this is our conclusion : our country now is headed towards two communities, one, black community and the other, white community, separate and inequal."[23] A realist and humanist, Jefferson wrote in the Declaration of Independence in 1830: "viewing these truths ourselves as witness, we exhort that all human beings are created equal, the creator has created them with definite non-transferable rights."[24]

About apartheid, Charles F. Marden and Gladys Meyer wrote, "the strong challenge posed by the black people has basically upset the equation of mutual relations between the black-white

people. Earlier, because of predominance of the white people, the black folk would adjust to it and would accept any concession or facility given by the white people but with the ongoing agitation by the black people, they have transformed their situation and the problem of the white people now is of adjustment with the black people. This movement by black people with more awareness has transformed the mutual relations between the people of both communities. Actually this has heightened the importance of conflict and raised its standard like a big national domestic issue."[25] This movement brought basic changes to the society there. Certainly, the contribution of such social reformers as Dr. Martin Luther King and Bobby Seal was noteworthy as ceaseless endeavours in the series of these changes.

Expressing his concerns, Bobby Seal wrote: "we need to establish a system which is based on complete equality for all, and its foundation should have as basis such a principle according to which both men and women in the society form mutual relations according to needs and aspirations, we want to see the establishment of socialism in which the elimination of the destructive hurdles has begun. We hope for the creation of such a society where a man and a woman are able to maintain relationships naturally."[26]

Equality and liberty are central to the group of subjects worth consideration although perhaps equality occupies the topmost position, "Americans have always viewed equality as a value which depicts best, the aspirations and objectives of individual and others in society and should be adopted by all communties and countries. Generally, equality has been seen as the truth and ambition in life here. In fact, society has brought actual equality to an unprecedented level here. America has displayed an exceptional distinction of social milieu. There people appear to be way ahead on the point of equality in property and intellect or in other words, they are more equal in their own power as compared to other countries in the world."[27]

The tasks for the all-round progress of the country that Babu Jagjivan Ram undertook were such as provided several oppurtunities for development to the people from

oppressed classes in the country. His endeavour was always to give a concrete shape to the principle of equal opportunities in the establishment of a casteless society. His life was identified by the creation of a society based on equality as against social disparities. Providing his unique contribution in the present structure and nation-building, he formulated several policies and programmes for the uplift of the crore of oppressed, exploited, harassed, backward and weaker sections of people of this vast country. He advocated the reservation in government jobs for these people from the deprived sections of the society because he knew that these people would not get appointment on any government post on merit basis in this caste-ridden society. He advocated reservation to bring the people belonging to scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and backward classes into the mainstream. As a national leader Babu Jagjivan Ram announced that reservation cannot be done away with, without doing away with castes present in the society. Today although Babu Jagjivan Ram is no longer in our midst yet in his philosophy, he will always be with us. He wrote, "the conflict for freedom of the oppressed classes people has begun. There are many obstacles and difficulties in the path. It is an unfair fight but without pausing or waiting we have to free ourselves, for this is human welfare."[28] Undoubtedly, Babu Jagjivan Ram's comment was in the context of the establishment of a casteless and egalitarian society in India.

Felicitating Babu Jagjivan Ram's great contribution to nation-building, the poet laureate, Maithali Sharan Gupt wrote:

Your holy name cannot be measured in terms of earth, wealth and land, your objectives are exalted, successful work Jagjivan Ram."

Former Prime Minister of India, Vishwanath Pratap Singh, recalling the meritorious work of Babu Jagjivan Ram observed, "He was a warrior at the fore, in the fight for freedom. He not only dreamt of nation building but also realised it as an able administrator. He was not merely the tears of the exploited, oppressed society but also their anguish and hope. Above all, he

was the son of the soil, the manliness of the nation before which the forces of disintegration dissipated."[29] Certainly, satisfying the public sentiments, egalitarian work of this great human being has become an integral part of our nation's memory.

Who would not remember the social service of this offspring of social revolution? Though a long tale of achievements, his life was also full of struggles. The former Prime Minister of the country, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, said in remembrance, "...He had to deal with a lot of venom in life but what he gave out was the elixir of goodwill. His heart was aflame against disparities. Still, all in all, his contribution was important for the country's unity, social amity and goodwill."[30]

Portraying the philosophy originating from Babu Jagjivan Ram's understanding as the basis of social change, former President Dr. Shankar Dayal Sharma commented: "Jagjivan Ram brings to fore our commitment to the dream of a just and liberal society where each individual's reputation would be respected equally. His accomplishments are tales of such changes which have already occurred and also which are taking place. It is our duty to carry them forward."[31]

In the holy scripture *Srimad Bhagvad Gita*, the good work by any individual is termed as worth emulating. A verse in it expounds that the conduct of good men are emulated by others. Through the medium of his noble deeds, the legacy that he leaves behind moulds the human community.[32] The validity of the contribution by Babu Jagjivan Ram in national interest, set an example before the entire society of the country. His conduct is worth emulating.

Come, let all of us countrymen, join hands for giving momentum to building a casteless and egalitarian India of Babu Jagjivan Ram's dreams.

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Tributes by his Contemporaries

My heart goes out in respectful admiration to Jagjivan Ram for his having emerged as the purest gold out of fire.

— *Mahatma Gandhi*

Jagjivan Ram has set an example in organising labour and oppressed classes uplift movement. He has given a new direction to public life in the labourer and oppressed classes settlements of Calcutta. The youth in the country can benefit the society and the country by his ideas.

— *Subhas Chandra Bose*

Jagjivan Ram is a strong-willed worker and also alongside he has been second to none in making sacrifices. His enthusiasm and perseverance is that of a zealot.

— *Dr. Rajendra Prasad*

The life of Shri Jagjivan Ram has itself proved the futility of casteism. Complete annihilation of caste differences from India will be a true tribute to him.

— *Saint Vinoba Bhave*

Shri Jagjivan Ram has extraordinary mental acumen. He has proved to be a successful administrator because of his sharp sense of judgement.

— *Chakravarty Rajgopalachari*

Shri Jagjivan Ram possesses knowledge, a liberal outlook and sympathy for the oppressed classes. He is adorned with the virtues of heart and mind.

— *Pt. Govind Vallabh Pant*

Babu Jagjivan Ram is India's foremost thinker, visionary and a sage politician who is concerned with the welfare of all— whether *harijan* or Brahmin, oppressed classes or untouchables

or the backward classes, Hindu or Muslim or Christian, belonging to North or East.

— Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

Jagjivan Ram is one of the ablest ministers in the country. Social barriers are gradually giving in and he has triumphed in this regard. He is not just an individual but also a political and social power without whose support it is impossible to imagine the creation of a new India.

— Jai Prakash Narayan

Shri Jagjivan Ram has actively contributed to the freedom movement of the country and after independence is now engaged in nation-building.

— Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel

Shri Jagjivan Ram is an excellent contemporary parliamentarian. As a brilliant and foremost politician in the Indian parliament, he has contributed to all national activities, with his vision, discretion and intelligence.

— Fakhruddin Ali Ahmad

Babuji is a highly cultured man with high ideals. He is the biggest name among the contemporary politicians. However, he has acquired universal respect and affection along with his stature and achievements. He will always be known as an honest, humble, simple and holy man and this is a fact that honours him with true accolades.

— B.D. Jatti

Jagjivan Ram has been at the fore in India's freedom movement. He has dedicated his life to the service of the motherland and has always spoken out for the poor and the oppressed. He has graced high positions with his capabilities and honesty in the public life of the country. His contribution in the field of oppressed classes uplift will always be remembered along with that of Mahatma Gandhi.

— V.V. Giri

Babu Jagjivan Ram is one of the prominent architects of the new India. He is the most talked about leader of this country. Crore

of the oppressed caste people, tribals, backward classes and minorities consider him as their saviour.

— *Indira Gandhi*

The national stature that Babuji has acquired is because of the poor of the country. He has always identified with the poor and fought for them.

— *C. Subramaniam*

Babuji's entire life was spent in working for the interest of the nation, the Congress, the poor and the miserable lot. He has always been a frontrunner in his long and very successful life, be it the freedom movement in the country or his role as a leader, working for the backward classes or the efforts at nation-building after 1947.

— *G.S. Dhillon*

Babuji's long career as a parliamentarian is the history of India's Independence and parliamentary democracy. Shri Jagjivan Ram is an agent of change in thoughts and a philosopher at heart. He is a pro-Gandhi revolutionary. He is a friend, philosopher and guide to the poor and the helpless. He connects with the people without distinctions of caste, opinions or religions. He is a great patriot and a parliamentarian par excellence.

— *R.D. Bhandare*

Jagjivan Ramji was a product of our national movement. He was sentenced in 1940 as an individual satyagraha-activist and again during the Quit India movement. He prepared himself for public service during these years of struggle. He displayed a commitment to the ideal of establishing a just and liberal society where individual dignity is respected equally. His achievements are a tale of such changes which, during this century, have already occurred, are taking place and also those that it is our duty to take forward.

— *Dr. Shakar Dayal Sharma*

Babu Jagjivan Ram was a towering personality of his generation first as a freedom-fighter and then as a nation-builder. In his public life of more than fifty years, he served India well. He received great respect from people of all sections in our society. He was

a leader of India. All in all, his personality, his command over the expression of his ideas, his steadfast political and parliamentarian skills and his administrative acumen played a crucial role in nation-building linking the society together and empowering it.

— *Rajiv Gandhi*

Babu Jagjivan Ram had connected people to the changing era and therefore he has become an integral part of our national memory. His memory will keep our history alive. All aspects of his life shine through, no matter from which angle we view it. He was a leading warrior in our fight for independence. As an able administrator, he brought alive his dreams of nation-building. As the Defence Minister, he made the nation proud over India's boundaries. Above all, he was son of the soil, a stalwart before whom the destructive forces dissipate. Today the need of the hour is to revive that stature.

— *Vishwanath Pratap Singh*

Babu Jagjivan Ram dignified whichever position he held. He adorned the gatherings he attended. He had to ingest a lot of poison in life but distributed only the elixir of goodwill. His heart was aflame against discrimination. Sometimes spark would erupt here and there but his contribution was significant in preserving unity, social goodwill and amity in the nation. During the war for the liberation of Bangladesh, his accomplishment in making our country self-reliant in the matter of food-grain shall always be remembered.

— *Atal Bihari Vajpayee*

Babuji's dedication, comprehensive knowledge, merit and his empowered personality has left a deep imprint on the various positions that he held. Babuji's example will always inspire us to build a strong India on the foundations of social justice.

— *P.V. Narasimha Rao*

Babuji's entire life was devoted to the service and uplift of the oppressed classes. This great son of India will always be remembered for playing an important role in the freedom movement and nation-building in the post-Independence India

— *Virendra Verma*

Babu Jagjivan Ram was the son of soil who served the motherland in thought, speech and action with his immense talent. His service to the weaker classes will always be remembered.

— *Govind Narayan Singh*

Through his ideals and high thinking, Babu Jagjivan Ram enthused a new faith and awareness in the weaker class people.

— *Kunwar Mahmud Ali Khan*

Babu Jagjivan Ram was an able freedom fighter, a patriot and a multi faceted personality. He was a great centurinarian man and through his ideals, personality and deeds, he performed historical feats, generating respect and admiration in the hearts of people from all sections of the society. Throughout his life, he made efforts to improve the lot of the exploited, backward and weaker sections of the society so that they can become self-reliant. He was their messiah and strong support.

— *B. Satyanarayan Reddy*

Shri Jagjivan Ram is an extraordinary personality in India's public life. His life was a long story of public service. He was a living legend. He symbolised India's commitment to the ideals of social, economic and political justice.

— *Dr. L.M. Singhvi*

Jagjivan Ram, popularly known as Babuji, was a towering personality of his time-first as a freedom fighter and later as a builder of modern India. Hailing from the backward classes in Bihar, he rose to become the Deputy Prime Minister of India in 1977 and held important portfolios such as Minister of Defence and Agriculture. Babuji's endearing personality, expression of his ideas, steadfast political and parliamentary skills and his administrative calibre, contributed to the social and political fabric of India.

In this book the author Dr. Om Prakash Maurya, has thrown light on the life and struggles of Babuji. The oppressed and deprived class of the Indian Society, consider him as their saviour.

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